

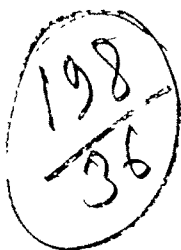
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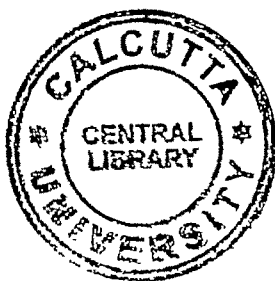
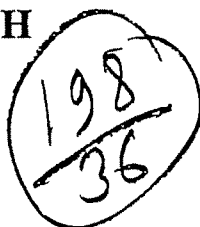
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## *Preface*

*A wider cross section of issues in literary studies has been included in the collection of essays and articles in this journal, especially as they relate more to the cultural ripples of the nineteenth century till our contemporary time, marking an exchange or transfer of significant moment. The first translation of the Bible into an Indian language, the post-Enlightenment coffee house, the profoundly moving poetry of Toru Dutt, sensitive issues of the literature of the North East, and Tagore are part of the enquiry — these areas are also ones in which we live and transition, as if across a medium of values. But we have also included a fresh assessment of the latest developments in contemporary avant-garde theater in Europe and a very novel approach to a Renaissance classic, Bacon's essays. The collection probably reflects the eclectic spirit of contemporary research and interests in literature, its wide variety and the way in which we posit the basic tenets of modern life. The Journal has been delayed because of unforeseen circumstances. We are glad to have brought it out sooner than we expected. Our thanks are due to the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Business and Finance) for quick re-imbursement of funds, the cordial and helpful inputs of our Press Superintendent and the entire Journal Committee of the Department of English for decisions on content and form.*

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## Contemporary English drama

*Prof. Dr. Margarete Rubik*

A survey of the literature of one's own time is always difficult. Which of the works will survive and which will be forgotten? Modern British drama has always exhibited great diversity. Writers can rarely be grouped into schools, but go their own way, writing in divergent genres and modes. A great many different styles flourish simultaneously, ranging from realism to non-realistic, illusion-breaking techniques, and plays deal with very diverse subject matters. In this survey I will concentrate on those plays and styles which received most critical attention and were most innovative.

Some early influences on the theatre of the 1990s were Artaud and his theatre of cruelty, propagating the idea that a dramatist should put on stage nightmares of human mind. The drama of the 1990s, too, has a nightmarish quality and abounds in images of violence.

Osborne and the Angry Young Men, who introduced a working class milieu, dealt with the disadvantaged living at edge of society. Though modern British theatre is said to date from *Look Back in Anger*, first performed in 1956, the play's structure was in fact quite conventional. What was new were the focus on working class characters and the language, and the aggressive criticism of the social hierarchy and class system. Just as there were Angry Young Men in the 1950s, there was a generation of disillusioned, frustrated young people in the 1990s – the “no future” generation.

Another influence was the Theatre of the Absurd, especially the use of absurd dialogue, in which there are no answers but non-sequitur replies, unfinished sentences, contradictions, in short, a dialogue in which communication has broken down. Nonetheless, the drift of the action is clear enough from the sub-text. Language is used as a power game, but can also create a bizarre sense of humour. Similar styles are used in In Yer Face Theatre.

### **In Yer Face Theatre of the 1990s :**

As defined by Alek Sierz (*In Yer Face Theatre, British Drama Today*. London: Faber 2001) this new drama is blatantly aggressive and provocative and hence impossible to ignore or avoid. It uses explicit scenes of sex and violence to explore the extremes of human emotion and to test the boundaries of acceptability. Outrages like rape, child abuse, drug addiction, murder, torture, cannibalism etc. are depicted on stage. The plays are extremely graphic in their portrayal of the dark side of human nature, very bleak in their view of humanity, but sometimes also display a grim humour. In Yer Face Theatre also breaks taboos with regard to the use of

violent language, blasphemy, pornography. Both in stage image and in language it is confrontational, relying on shock effects and forcing the audience out of its comfortable assumptions and blind spots. The cruelty on stage and the violent language intend to provoke the spectators. These plays can be effective, but they are certainly nothing for the squeamish.

The best known representative of In Yer Face Theatre is Sarah Kane (born 1971) who committed suicide in 1999. Her best known plays are: *Blasted* (1995), *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998), and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000).

Her *Blasted* created the biggest theatre scandal since Edward Bond's *Saved* in 1965. People furiously called for the censor, they got up and left. The reviewers regarded the play as repellent and complained about the bombardment with cruelties, sadism and depravity. The play was denounced as a "disgusting feast of filth", whose use of violence was gratuitous and only calculated to create a scandal. Kane defended the violence of her play by arguing that it is based on real events.

It is, of course, well known that violence and gore are nothing new in the theatre: Shakespeare portrayed shocking cruelties in *Titus Andronicus* or *King Lear*, Jacobean horror tragedies are full of blood and gore. In the late 1960s, as a reaction to the abolishment of censorship, dramatists presented scenes of outrage on stage. And in film we have had a spate of splatter movies, and a huge fan following of cult films such as *Pulp Fiction*. Besides, just think of all the atrocities we watch on TV every day.

In Yer Face Theatre has such a profound shock effect because we do not expect to see such horrors in the theatre. Indeed, it is more shocking to see a living body of an actor seemingly undergo torture right in front of our eyes. In such circumstances we cannot remain detached. Absurdly, the fictional cruelty in the theatre is more shocking than the real cruelties we hear about in the newspapers and on TV.

Nowadays critics generally acknowledge the depth of these plays and the genuine horror and anguish about the modern world the writers want to express. In Yer Face playwrights attack the complacency with which modern society has come to accept news about war, homicide and cruelty: we consume these in the news while we happily eat our breakfast.

The play *Blasted* (1995) is typical of the genre. It deals with a brutalised reporter and his half-witted girlfriend, while an unspecified civil war is raging in the streets. The action involves bomb blasts, male and female rape, suicide, cannibalism, the sucking out of an eye. Even the language imitates a war – the quick turn-taking in the conversation resembles a shoot-out. The main character, Ian, is sexist, racist and homophobic – but he is in turn savaged by a soldier who rapes him. The soldier has himself been brutalised by the horrible murder of his girlfriend at the



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hands of enemy troops and wants revenge, and if he cannot take it out on the original killers, anyone else will do. The influences of Antoine Artaud and the language of the theatre of the absurd are unmistakable. The action often seems gratuitous and exaggerated, but every incident in her play was closely modelled on real events. Kane said that she was inspired in her plot by the atrocities during the Bosnian war. For instance, the description of the torture, mutilation and murder of the soldier's girl friend is clearly reminiscent Bosnian war-crimes.

Kane did not want her stage directions to be taken literally. Some of them are unperformable anyway. She was unhappy with realistic stagings. She did not want the audience to see blow jobs and mutilations on stage. The cruelties are images of a brutalized world and meant to be performed in a stylized way (like in Artaud's plays), not ultra-realistically like in a Tarantino movie.

Kane continued to write two other plays in this In Yer Face vein, and many other writers followed her model in the late 1990s. But the shock quickly wears off, even in the theatre, and the fashion of this theatre of cruelty wore itself out. Today, few plays are written in this style. Even Kane's last plays are different. But what her development would have been if she had not killed herself is impossible to tell. Her last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, not as violent as her other plays, but a very touching account of depression which finally leads to suicide. 4.48 is supposedly the most common time for suicides to take place. It is written in the form of an inner monologue and displays a superb ability to communicate the state of a mentally ill person – something very difficult to communicate. Kane in her experimental style breaks up normal syntax – the voices stammer, sometimes wax poetic, are sometimes confused, echoing the mental ups and downs of the main character. The play is poetic, violent and full of black humour in turn. What is even more unusual, no speakers are indicated. In performance, the lines can be attributed to any number of persons. What emerges from the play is a patient-therapist relation, and some of the dialogues are reminiscent of psychotherapy sessions. There is obviously also the voice of a person who suffers not only from her psychosis but also from the terrible side-effects of the drugs she is given and which cannot really help her. Because it does not define the speakers, however, the play offers itself to many different interpretations. It has been performed by only 1 actress, or by 2, or even 5 different actors.

Another well-known In Yer Face playwright is Mark Ravenhill. He wrote a play with the provocative title of *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), which had to be advertised as *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing*, because at that time a 19<sup>th</sup> century law forbade the use of the f-word in print. The play deals with junk culture, sex and consumerism, and the loss of ideals. It is set in the milieu of unemployed, drug-addicted characters and shows the lack of love, commercialisation and egotism in contemporary society. Like Kane, Ravenhill takes a bleak view of humanity. Again, there is plenty of violence and explicit scenes of homosexuality. The critic of the *Financial Times*

quipped in his review: "If the Marquis de Sade and Karl Marx could have co-authored a play for today; this is it." Nonetheless, there was not half as much outrage as in Kane's case – possibly for reasons of gender. The author said that the upfront title gave fair warning about the play's content. Indeed, the title is appropriate to a play about a capitalist society in which all human relations are reduced to a consumerist rationale and exploited in terms of financial transactions. Other In Yer Face dramatists are, for instance, Marina Carr, Jez Butterworth, David Harrower, Martin McDonagh, or, more recently Simon Stephen, who in *Motortown* (2006) portrayed a traumatised and brutalised soldier returning from Iraq to a desolate England and venting his aggression on a teenage girl. As in Scorsese's film *Taxi Driver* the trauma of war haunts the returned soldier and his values.

### British drama in the new Millenium :

By the middle of the first decade of the new millenium, In Yer Face Theatre had largely gone out of fashion. Nowadays British drama is characterised by great diversity. To be sure, there are few completely realistic plays, and the convention of 4<sup>th</sup> wall has been given up. But a great variety of genres and styles co-exist. What is remarkable is that some critics speak of a "post-dramatic" fashion of writing – which gives up the traditional forms of drama in which characters interact and communicate with one another in a linear plot.

This new type of 'post-dramatic' drama was influenced, for instance, by Berthold Brecht, who had already exerted an influence on some dramatists of the 1960s and 1970s. His "epic" plays are characterized by an episodic structure, the use of various alienation techniques (such as commentator figures, slides, contrasting scenes instead of a chronological plot, plays within the play etc.), and a political message. There had already been a spate of political English theatre in the 1970s and early 1980s, when dramatists wrote agit-prop plays in reaction to Thatcher's neo-liberal policies, which involved massive unemployment and a cut in the subsidies for the arts and theatres. These older playwrights had used Brechtian techniques.

There was an upsurge of political theatre in Britain after 9/11. Whereas In Yer face theatre concentrated on private lives and hovered uneasily between culture critique, cool detachment and oblique social protest, a political agenda is back nowadays, in a theatre which addresses big-scale political questions: international relations and international law, the situation in the Middle East, racism, the war on terror, but also national policies, such as investigations into the role of the military in Northern Ireland (*Bloody Sunday*), institutionalized racism in the police (*The Colour of Justice*), or the result of the privatisation of national industries (*The Permanent Way*), etc.

The most innovative new form of drama which developed in the new millenium is documentary theatre, which deals with real life characters and historical events,

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and relies on historical documents, research, real interviews, etc., which are then linked together in a sort of montage. Writers of documentary theatre are, for instance, Norton-Taylor (writing for the Tricycle Theatre), David Hare, Michael Frayn, or Tanika Gupta.

Documentary theatre can take various forms: verbatim theatre is exclusively made up of documentary material. Examples would be the so-called Tribunal Plays of the Tricycle Theatre: Nicholas Kent and Richard Norton-Taylor edited materials from various official court inquiries (e.g. into the death of a black boy and the institutionalised racism of the police, in *The Colour of Justice* or the killing of 13 Northern Irish civilians by British soldiers during a protest march in *Bloody Sunday*). Similarly, Hare's *The Permanent Way* makes use of authentic interviews and statements. His play is about the disastrous consequences of the privatisation of railways, which led them to value share value prizes more than safety. Another example is *Guantanamo* by Vittoria Britain and Gillian Slovo, a play that is made up of letters of prisoners in the infamous American detention camp and interviews with relatives, lawyers and civil rights activists.

Other documentary plays mix verbatim source material with invented private scenes. Hare's *Stuff Happens* mingles authentic and invented material, as does Gupta's *Gladiator Games*.

Still other playwrights dramatize historical material. The events dealt with are historical, but we do not really have authentic verbatim material about them but only, for instance, memoirs or testimonies of witnesses, which are then dramatised. One such play is Frayn's *Democracy*, about a spy scandal in Germany.

Not all docu-drama deals with political events or events on a national scale: there are plays dealing with the lives of elderly women, relying on interviews which are then arranged in a particular order, not necessarily chronological, or Tanika Gupta's *Sugar Mummies*, which is based on her research on female sex tourism in the Caribbean.

What distinguishes docu-drama from history plays (such as Shakespeare, for instance, wrote) is its implicit claim to authenticity since it uses factual source material and refer to actual places and existing persons, whose statements have been documented. The genre borrows from the format of a TV-reportage and therefore sounds authentic and convincing. But in fact theatre can never really make such a claim to historical authenticity. Although the writers often speak of themselves as editors and try to hide their role in the construction of the play, it is, of course, obvious that in these plays, as indeed in any historical writing, truth is always a matter of construction. For one, there is the problem of selection from the vast amount of documentary material, and the problem of employment. Hayden White has pointed out the problem of employment in historiography: even the historian has to select what he regards as relevant facts, has to arrange them into a

narrative sequence which suggests causal connection, and must exclude other facts. The same is true of docu-drama. Secondly, the way you string interviews or statements together can have an implicitly evaluative effect. Another problem is de-contextualisation: if you take verbatim speeches out of context and arrange them in order to contrast different standpoints, this can manipulate our sympathies. Statements, through their de-contextualisation, may be made to sound balder and sharper than they did originally. Also, there is the problem of hindsight: from the vantage point of the audience, who often know what happened, for instance after the so-called American victory in Iraq, the earlier statements of politicians may seem either naive or cynical. A further issue to consider is dramatic enactment: body language and gestures can make a character likeable or not. There is generally little attempt in documentary theatre to make the actors look like the historical figures they impersonate. But it is often important for our sympathy which actor plays a character: any crook could be made to look likable if George Clooney or Colin Firth were to play him.

Although it is tempting to think that documentary plays are authentic historical records, none of the playwrights in fact claims total objectivity or authenticity. No-one will seriously believe that a dramatist is a historian, after all, the text is performed in a theatre, not in a newscast on TV. The paratext marks all these texts as literary: they are marketed as plays and performed on stage; their authors are well-known literary figures. As literature, these texts per definition waive any claim to historical accuracy or authenticity. On the other hand the dramatists affirm that the material used is documentary. Hare, for instance, in his play *Stuff Happens* claims that "nothing in the narrative is knowingly untrue" although he "used his imagination" in the scenes taking place behind closed doors. It is because of this ambiguous position between fact and fiction that people attacked in such plays have often complained about unfairness, and that what is presented on stage is not "true". Docu-dramas are often evaluated not according to aesthetic but according to political and journalistic criteria. They are reviewed as polemical or accurate, unfair or objective – rather than gripping, with convincing characters and a good structure, etc.

Docu-drama plays an important role at a time when the media usually do not fulfil their investigating function. They mainly go for entertainment, or are afraid of political pressure and law-suits. But you can hardly sue theatre, because it is "only" a play.

Documentary theatre has also been accused of preaching only to the converted, i.e. those that are of the same critical opinion anyway. Perhaps this is true, but it is also important to strengthen the morale of a critical public the media too often lie to. People do not want from political theatre a clarity they are not getting from politicians, nor from TV, which is often under state control. Docu-drama therefore fulfils a therapeutic function of voicing the frustrations of an electorate which has

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learned to distrust the truth value of official political information and for enlightenment turns to the dramatist instead.

Of course it is difficult to predict if its topicality will stand the test of time. To be sure, theatre must speak to contemporary audience. But it is also interesting that most of these plays did not travel well to other countries.

One of the best-known writers of documentary plays is David Hare. He started writing in 1968 as a left wing agit-prop writer, but then moved away from party propaganda. He attacks neo-Liberalism, but is also a powerful critic of New Labour. In the 1980s he wrote the Condition of England trilogy and examined England through three major institutions: the Church, Judiciary and Labour Party. He has also written more private plays in a style of psychological realism, but has now turned back to politics in the form of docu-drama.

*Stuff Happens* deals with the various events, lies and political manoeuvres leading to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Iraqi war. The title refers to Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld's infamous shrugging off criticism of the chaos and destruction after the American invasion of Iraq ("stuff happens"). The material is meticulously researched. Most scenes are based on verbatim documentary material, some scenes however are invented. He incorporates actual speeches of historical personages, and in the invented scenes which happen behind closed doors, when the playwright can only speculate what happened, for instance, in the oval office, he uncannily imitates the tone and thought patterns of the real-life politicians he portrays. For instance, he catches the exact turn of phrase of people like Bush and Rumsfeld. Like most docu-drama the play thus hovers on the borderline between fact and fiction, historiography and literature.

*Stuff Happens* has no linear plot line or even recognizable plot. A narrator sums up the events, introduces the various settings and dramatis personae, who then step forward to state their opinions. They address their arguments to the audience and rarely interact with one another (a typical post-dramatic technique). Like a Brechtian play, *Stuff Happens* covers a long period of time. It quotes from interviews with famous politicians, but also nameless common men from all over the world are given an (often angry) say. The various viewpoints and comments on the invasion clash and reflect upon one another. Paradoxically, these post-dramatic, anti-illusionist techniques do not undermine the implicit truth claim of the play but strengthen it. The play imitates the format of a TV documentary, which is also free of the boundaries of time and space. A TV documentary may cut from one place of action to the other, from one commentator to the other, from one witness to the other and simply string all these statements together for an overview.

Not all docu-drama tries to make a political point, like *Stuff Happens*. Michael Frayn *Copenhagen* is an attempt to explore the past: what happened when the

German physicist Heisenberg visited Niels Bohr during the Second World War to talk about the atomic bomb? The play uses Heisenberg's uncertainty principle as an image for its dramatic technique. We can never be completely sure what happened, or what the motivations of the characters really were. Even an eye witness would only have seen a very subjective truth, since he would have no insight into the other man's motivations and plans. The uncertainty principle is also a fitting metaphor in regard to language itself – which is unable to reveal the precise truth, since meaning, according to Derrida, is always deferred. Language cannot be pinned down to a definitive meaning. Also Frayn's play *Democracy* is really more about human relations than politics.

As mentioned above, some plays are not concerned with weighty political questions: Tanika Gupta is a writer of Indian descent. As I pointed out above, her *Sugar Mummies* deals with female sex tourism in Jamaica, and *Gladiator Games* is a semi-documentary about a black boy imprisoned for a minor offence and killed by a skinhead who was locked up in the same cell. Her *Fragile Land*, on the other hand, is not a docu-play at all but a conventionally structured play about the situation of young second-generation immigrants who are torn between adapting to the Western world and the traditional world-views of their parents, and how this impacts on school and their first experiences of love. This goes to show that dramatists do not exclusively write in one genre but try their hand at various genres and styles.

Among the host of other interesting dramatists I want to single out a few more names, more or less randomly, to show the diversity of styles and techniques in contemporary British theatre. Martin Crimp is a writer more popular, perhaps, with academics than with audiences, as he writes radically post-dramatic drama. For instance, *Attempts on Her Life* is a play without a plot, but consisting of a series of vignettes in which media makers, family, friends, etc. try to construct the picture of a woman. There is no way in which we can find out what she is really like – her image is a hollow construction which suits the purposes of the people forging this image.

In contrast, the satirists are popular with the audience. Alistair Beaton's *Feelgood* is a satirical portrait of Tony Blair and his campaigning. Richard Bean's *England People Very Nice* deals with four successive waves of immigrants to London. Its humour was accused of racism and stereotyping, but it proved a great commercial success.

Joe Penhall, in contrast, is a writer of problem plays in a more or less realistic vein, without being old-fashioned. He dramatises moral dilemmas and is at his best when he gives convincing arguments to both antagonists which make it impossible for the audience to take sides – such as in *Blue/Orange* (about schizophrenia) or *Landscapes with Weapon* (about the moral responsibility of

## Contemporary English Drama

scientists who develop weapons of mass destruction). Penhall's stance is a critique of postmodern culture's attitude that "anything goes". Despite their sober subject matter, all his plays are black comedies or tragi-comedies involving generous doses of humour but also passages of poetic richness. It is interesting to compare Penhall's treatment of mental illness in *Blue/Orange* to that of Sarah Kane in *4.48 Psychosis*. In Penhall's play, the mentally unstable person cannot express himself in the same way as in Kane's *Psychosis*. Instead, Penhall explores the question whether diagnoses of mental illness may not also be due to cultural differences in behaviour norms between white psychiatrists and black patients. The play shows how a difference of opinion as to the treatment of a black patient between two doctors ends up in a vicious power struggle, with both doctors only interested in their careers and quite blind to the needs of the patient.

There would be many more modern dramatists worth mentioning. Contemporary theatre continues to display a fascinating variety and richness of styles and genres and great diversity of subject matter. It is alive and vibrant, and fashions are changing fast. In the near future, we are likely to see new and innovative developments and again a shift in emphasis and style. But in what direction theatre will be moving in the next decade is as yet impossible to predict.

## Replacing One Terror with Another : The Solipsistic Sub-Text of Bacon's 'Essay on Death'

*Santanu Majumdar*

Bacon's essays do not at first sight seem to offer much evidence for a solipsistic stance. Unlike Montaigne's essays, they are not immediately or obviously personal, but seem to be written with definite agendas in mind, agendas which are usually of a conservative, political and pragmatic nature. It is true that from time to time, like the typical Pindaric ode, these essays, beginning with public concerns, lapse into the intimately personal, but unlike the Pindaric ode, they do so in an oblique and indirect way. The overriding concern of the typical Baconian essay is the preservation of the existing political order, and Bacon is forever showing signs of disturbance, even of paranoia, at the very possibility of ruling orders being upset or reversed. While this is conspicuously true of the essay on nobility or that on riches, the concern crops up in unlikely places, with unlikely topics. It may well be argued that a conservative political pragmatist could scarce afford the luxuries of solipsistic isolation.

Yet there is no doubt whatsoever that solipsism was an important concept – indeed more than a concept, a *Weltanschauung* – in the English Renaissance. Derived from compounding the Latin *solus* with *ipse*, solipsism is at least as old as the pre-Socratic Gorgias, who held that nothing exists; further, that if something did exist, one could not know anything about it; further, if one did know, one could not communicate such knowledge to others. In what we like to call the modern world its high priest is of course Descartes, even though he did not formally subscribe to this extreme version of his idealism. The gaining of dominance within the domain of modern philosophy of mind by the school of Chalmers (David Chalmers is the author of the seminal *The Conscious Mind*: Oxford 1996, an elegant and authoritative refutation of materialism, demonstrating that consciousness does not supervene on the physical world), with its accent and emphasis on, indeed its celebration of, sensory qualia, calls for an increased attention to the solipsistic tradition in English literature. For it is but a natural progression from sensory qualia to solipsistic isolation, or to the possibilities of it.

Sensory qualia are infallibly held by the person experiencing them. If I see a round red apple in front of me, there can be precious little doubt (actually, none) that I do see red and I do see round. The object in question may not be an apple of course, it might be a cardboard cut-out, an image in a mirror, or a cricket ball, or something else. But the redness and the roundness that I see, and indeed the solidity if I happen to feel it with my hands, cannot be questioned. This is in sharp contradistinction to psychological qualia, where fallibility is a far from rare condition – psychologists are always unearthing cases of love masquerading as hate and vice versa.



Or so would it seem. But the so-called infallibility can be and are questioned in the inverted or absent spectrum scenarios. It is entirely possible, conjecturally (or even empirically, in the case of colour-blind persons, for example) to see colours differently from others. A person who saw red where others saw green, due to some peculiarity of her sensory apparatus, would never know it and neither would others, because she has always called it red. Sensory qualia are ineffable and incommunicable and in this sense deeply private. Indeed it is entirely possible for there being a separate feel of redness for every sentient organism in the universe, human or otherwise. There could be billions of feels of redness around, without anyone being any the wiser about it. Locke entertains this possibility in his *Essay* when he says that one man's mind cannot pass into another man's body. It should be noted that even in these absent or inverted qualia scenarios, the infallibility of sensation is not ultimately questioned. My redness remains my redness, my pain remains my pain, even if it is different from yours. Whether it is so different can never be discovered.

At the most fundamental level solipsism is the belief that only perceptions truly exist (the movement from sensation to perception is problematic but will have to be pragmatically ignored here). Solipsism can be metaphysical or epistemological. For all its incoherence and counter-intuitiveness, it is important for the literary historian and the literary critic because of its massive influence on the course of the English literary tradition. There are strong Renaissance and humanist roots of this literary tendency, especially in Shakespeare. Scepticism if of course widespread and influential in Renaissance culture and in Shakespeare, as Sukanta Chaudhuri and others have so ably demonstrated.<sup>1</sup> But the passage from skepticism to solipsism is not inevitable. It is unlikely that solipsism in the strong and the technical sense had much currency in medieval or humanist culture, although no doubt it would be fairly easy to find many quotations which would seem to give this sense. When Augustine says, for instance, *in interiore hominum habitat veritas*, he is not being formally a solipsist. For Augustine the possibilities of communication, as much as the ontology of the self, is guaranteed by God. As Reino Vitranen, in his article entitled 'The Spectre of Solipsism in Western Literature', observes:

As for such well-known tropes as that from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on," the word we indicates the existence of other minds. Calderón's theme of "Life is a dream" is likewise based on the existence of others

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<sup>1</sup> Sukanta Chaudhuri, *Infirm Glory: Shakespeare and the Renaissance Image of Man*, Oxford, New York, 1981. This is a summary of the general stance of the book.

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besides the dreaming self. In the Spanish play, the dreamer believes that others exist. And his deceiver also exists. It is only from outside of the dreamer can the inference be made that the dreamer's dream is but a dream. The dreamer hardly ever suspects that he is dreaming. Neither the dreamer nor his external observer can be a solipsist. Examples of genuine solipsism are to be found in German literature of the late eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

But even in Renaissance culture, and in Shakespeare, solipsism in a wider and non-technical sense is of course a strong presence. I believe it would not be wide of the mark to label the world of Shakespearean drama, and especially Shakespearean tragedy, as one where the characters who matter most in imaginative terms find themselves increasingly lonely and isolated and unable to reach out to others even when they are part of or in interaction with teeming communities. Moreover they believe in their perceptions strongly enough to want, sometimes wishfully, to ignore, to use a famous phrase of George Eliot, 'equivalent centres of self'. They can hardly be expected to be solipsists in the technical, philosophical sense. Nevertheless a solipsistic Shakespeare is, I think, rather credible because living and working, as actor as well as playwright, in a very public, face-to-face society, a society deeply marked by numerous rituals of communality, ranging from blood-sports and duels to the theatre, a great dramatist like him would naturally and inevitably want to express the fundamental solitude of the human condition. And, fitly if a bit ironically, it is, I would argue, lovers in Shakespeare, who by the very act of loving yearn and crave for communality, who probably experience and suffer such solitude at its most incisive. Their loneliness usually increases through the texts.

There are of course scarcely any lovers in the world of Bacon's essays, but there are plenty of lonely rulers and emperors, unable to trust their subjects, their friends or their wives. I will, however, confine myself to a single and short essay, and a justly famous one, entitled 'Of Death', and try to see whether it offers any concessions to a solipsistic world-view.

The ostensible purpose of the essay, a professedly Christian one, is to rid men and women of their superstitious fear of death. All religions regard death as a cause of celebration rather than of lamentation, since through death one either passes into a higher world or reunites with God, or both. Yet, as Bacon – who is an empiricist par excellence – notes, Christianity often surrounds the notion of death with those of torture and punishment, of hellfire and brimstone. Although his

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<sup>2</sup> The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association, Vol. 19, No. 1. (Spring, 1986), pp.59-76.

agenda might be overtly Christian, Bacon does not hesitate to criticize the friars' books of mortification for exaggerating the pains of death. His pertinent and percipient empirical observation is that death is relatively painless compared to the tortures inflicted regularly upon prisoners. And in the course of making this point, Bacon does look forward to and anticipate to some extent Cartesian dualism, when he says: "for the most vital parts are not the quickest of sense": he might even be, in an uncanny way, anticipating the modern neurological discovery that the brain has no pain sensors. Cartesian dualism is of course an essential and primary condition for moving towards solipsism.

Having shown that as a matter of empirical fact death is not always painful in the sensory sense, Bacon makes a logical progression (in the sense that psychological qualia are temporally and ontologically posterior to and derivative upon sensory qualia) when he says that almost any strong emotion – revenge, love, honour, grief, even a sense of ennui engendered by the Sisyphean nature of quotidian experience – is sufficient for the average man to overcome the terrors of death. Except that he is not talking of the average man but rather of Roman generals and emperors. It is intriguing why, having set out with a Christian agenda, Bacon should cite the examples of mostly pagan Roman personalities, but then this is his standard practice throughout the essays. Written, like almost all other Baconian essays, in the sparse and staccato Senecan style, with a predominantly triadic structure to the sentences, where the fulfillment of our auditory expectations in terms of such structure sometimes tends to obscure deficiencies of sense, and presumably directed at the average man who is scared of death (indeed in the initial lines he is compared to a child afraid of the dark), the essay on death, like so many others, cites examples of exceptional and presumably brave Romans — Caesar, Galba, Vespasian, Severus, Tiberius. Bacon's point is that the prospect of imminent death did not alter the dispositions and essential characters of these people, a point which anticipates the Cartesian stand in *The Meditations* – written some sixty years later – that physical changes such as amputations do not change the essential nature of the subject, since *res cogitans* is unaffected by changes in *res extensa*. It is interesting that Bacon should attribute to Tiberius the quiddity of "dissimulation". In Ben Jonson's play *Sejanus Tiberius* is a rather more complex character: "While I can live, I'll restrain earth's fury/hemou thanantos gaia miktheto puri" [*Sejanus his Fall*], he says (the second line means: "After my death let fire burn up the earth").

Bacon's essay has a conventional ending, conforming to the usual pieties of "nunc dimittis", and offering the social reward of being loved rather than envied when one is dead. But what is much more interesting is not what is said but rather what is left out. So many emperors and generals are quoted, but there is no mention of Hadrian, reputed author of the most famous short poem ever written on death :

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Animula, vagula blandula,  
Hospes comesque corporis,  
Quae sunt abibis in loca,  
Pallidula, rigida, nudula,  
Nec ut soles, dabis jocos?  
[Little soul, fleeting and charming, a joyful guest of the body,  
where wil you be going now, all by yourself,  
pale, rigid, and naked?]

The English translation can scarcely capture the chilling effects of the Latin word order. Utter solitude at the present point in time is contrasted to former joy. This is dualism at its starkest, but the radical mind-body disjunction is not being celebrated : it is being regarded with bleak horror. Denuded of its bodily shelter, the soul is belittled, lonely, pale, naked, and deprived of joy. The body is therefore by implication what provides the soul (or the spirit or mind, here used co-extensively) with its glory and grandeur. Even if he knew of this poem, and he probably did, Bacon could scarce afford to quote it since the poem, with devastating honesty, deconstructs and erases the Christian message of the soul's superiority over the body.

But what he cannot afford to quote or dare to acknowledge may be the very sub-text of Bacon's famous essay, even if an unwitting and a reluctant one. The intermittent gestures towards Cartesian dualism may ultimately be gestures towards solipsism, an outlook and an *Weltanschauung* that deconstructs the Christian message because the soul is not regarded as the greater reality but rather (in so far as it is co-extensive with consciousness) the only reality. Seen in the context of the entire corpus of Bacon's essays, which speak so often of lonely men, and given the shrill insistence in this one on death as a public event that is to be regarded socially (an insistence at odds with the underlying tone of plangency that pervades the text throughout), one is tempted to construct or recover a sub-text which sees death as only the limiting and extreme manifestation of the loneliness that is an inevitable part of life – denouncing the superstitious physical terrors that the vulgar associate with death, the essay replaces it with the muted terror engendered by the possibility that death is a natural extension of life, not the entry into a radically different world that Christianity promises it to be.

## Codifying the New Bengali Prose : William Carey's Bengali Translation of the Bible

*Tirtha Prasad Mukhopadhyay*

Translation may be defined as a performative, or illocutionary act, or at least in terms that are similar to J L Austin's – a re-formation (in another language) of a piece, brief, or extended, of an utterance. To re-form the utterance implies [a] drainage [b] reconstitution of meaning, [meaning also implies something more than meaning or more appropriately what one might call accretion of 'resonance' or significance for a biologically localized community of speakers at a given point in time. To state in terms of its simplest denominators, therefore, translation may be regarded as a reconstitution or 'ingress' of a particular kind of semantic form - the form of an emotive resonance felt in one language in another language.

A sentence *qua* utterance does not merely convey meaning, but an integrated vibration comprising [a] data i.e. reference/referential meaning [b] implication i.e., figurative (or additional) meaning and [c] affect i.e. emotive modification of the receiver/listener: an act of linguistic meaning is one of those paradoxical examples in nature of a unity of components which far exceeds the sum of its parts, and it thereafter begins to acquire a past or existence of its own, like a string of life, with its invisible presence featured into the life of the whole of nature and the social web. The sentence is almost like a living entity, like a phantom which cannot be seen but which exists and continues to influence those under its spell. It may be supra-biotic for all that we know. *Namaste vaco* (obeisance to you oh speech), says the Taaittiriya Upanishad – as it considers the speech act as a deific agency. Jesus is reported to have said in the Gospel According to John: In the 'seed' is the word. Chomsky has gravitated to the idea of speech as an invisible organ or limb – Steven Pinker describes it as being something similar to the elephant's snout, only in this case an invisible snout. Perhaps the best possible description of what an utterance conveys is to be found in the Patanjali-Bhāṣya, which defines the communicative act as an epiphany (albeit psychosomatic) - of the *self*, or the *atman* – and whatever that word *atman* might mean in the delusional forest of being – one which evokes a typical state of mind. Time and again we deceived ourselves to believe that a sentence transmits *just* 'meaning', or 'sense' if only because of our unquested conformity to the delusions of appearance, where there is no opportunity of infidelity to the lucubrations of causal reasoning. Rather than being so decisive in our attitude to the idea of 'meaning' it behoves us that we be a little more imaginative, or even credulous about the absurdity of that pulse that any utterance generates. The sentence compositely declaims affect, it enables the speaker to emote, or transfigure information so that it serves behavioral functions like (a) exertion (b) grieving (c) compromising through zero sum games. The

sentence is a functional paradigm of some sort; in its ultimate form it becomes a kind of functional-reflexive/emotive equivalent for human actions and the peculiar variations on survival.

Any poetic line is a good example of the modular capacity of the sentence to evoke a hierarchy of effects- namely of (a) data/reference, (b) stress (c) discharge (d) obsession, *etc.* But the indispensable component of poetry is (e) *affect* – a peculiar kind of excitable state which accompanies sportive activities, mimicry, and specifically the arts, including, of course, poetry. How a poem do this could be understood by first assessing the full import of the poetic line which is necessarily but completely set apart from other kinds of lines or units of utterance by its ability to splay meaning and re-materialize excitement or delight – what in other words may be called the affective line.

Now, ‘translation’ etymologically means ‘to turn’ or arrange –that is sequence the meaning and its psycho-behavioral inputs into another language system; in this sense it may also be referred to homolog cloning. Translation theory of Eugene Nida deserves to be mentioned here, if not in the specific context of the translation of the Bible itself then in relation to the art of translating religious texts in general.<sup>1</sup> Nida creates the paradigm of Bible translation in the formulation of a theory of equivalence. Nida suggests that translation is the transfer of dynamically realized equivalence. Translation, accordingly (and in agreement with Nida’s views) depends on an act of successful re-formulation or optimal transfer of equivalent meaning and by extension the transfer of emotive resonance associated with it. Since users of different languages conceive, reify or morph meaning in distinctive ways translation could be done only by finding an iota of signifying techniques / codes, rather than by of one –to- one grammatical or syntactical correlation. The translator of a line from English to Bengali, or from Bengali to English would have to enter through a portal of all the self-assuming techniques /codes of the target language. It would be impossible, according to Nida’s thesis of dynamic equivalence, to maintain syntactic order while translating for example from language systems like English to that of Bengali where the latter, unlike the former generally uses an object case before a verb sequence in framing sentences rather than (as in English) which uses a verb before the object case .

Finally, one indispensable qualification of the translator is hermeneutic, the possession of interpretative skills adequate for explication of exoteric doctrine or truth. Here again we face an almost veiled mysticism although it might not be so obfuscating as we are trying to make it appear; mysticism may be explained as a cognitive short-cut. The more relevant detail is on the need to focalize beyond the pointilic nature of sentences to reveal that full corpus of meaning or resonance of

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<sup>1</sup> The Theory and Practice of Translation. 1943.

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the lines / utterances that any text has in store. The translator is first a reader, a competent reader. Stanley Fish's doctrine of 'literary competence' may be a key requirement for the realization of meaning, at least to any adequate degree since its may be true that full translation is an impossibility, especially so of texts like the Bible – whose verbal form is considered by believers to be only germinal or shadowy, a partial reflection or *shekinah* of the glory that it signifies.

In focus is William Carey's translation of the New Testament; Carey was dedicated in the life-long search for his lord's pasture which brought him to India. Carey's stature is almost apostolic as far as the history of the Protestant Church is concerned, the dissenting or protestant church that is. George Smith writes:

In countries like India and China, where civilization has long ago reached its highest level, and has been declining for want of the salt of a universal Christianity, it is the missionary again who interferes for the highest ends, but by a different process. Mastering the complex classical speech and literature of the learned and priestly class, and living with his Master's sympathy among the people whom that class oppresses, he takes the popular dialects which are instinct with the life of the future; where they are wildly luxuriant he brings them under law, where they are barren he enriches them from the parent stock so as to make them the vehicle of ideas such as Greek gave to Europe, and in time he brings to the birth nations worthy of the name by a national language and literature lighted up with the ideas of the Book which he is the first to translate. This was what Carey did for the speech of the Bengalees. To them, as the historians of the fast approaching Christian future will recognise, he was made what the Saxon Boniface had become to the Germans, or the Northumbrian Baeda and Wyclif to the English.<sup>2</sup>

We could circumvent two political truisms about missionary activity: first, that like brahminical orthopraxy evangelical mission is also intricately linked to economics of control and appropriation. Second, the necessity of translation is intrinsic to mission; hence the political *raison de etre* for writing Bengali translations of the Bible may be other than what Carey himself supposes to be true. Linguistically, however, Carey sought to bring Bengali prose syntax (as George Smith also shows) in conformity to the 'law' – that same coincidence of the spirit in its eternal synthesis, the rise of the voice of god and the containment through the speech of man which justifies the character of scripture. Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* contains the classic definition of this law or principle that animates the Bible. Carey himself considered the art of translating as a life function. Smith wrote: 'every moment of his time, was directed to setting Him (GOD) forth... LIKE the growth of a tree is the development of a language, as really and as strictly according to law.' Carey's success in translation may be assessed from the absolute of his correlative translation, what Eugene Nida calls verbal equivalence

<sup>2</sup> George Smith. 'Introduction'. *Life of William Carey*. 1909.

but then even as he maintains word-for-word equivalence Carey sets forth the law of scripture, the *anima*, or word that has been revealed, the affective “word of god”.

The exact moment of Carey’s Bengali prose style may be understood from a study of his translation of the Gospel according to Matthew. Carey started the translation in 1800 – the first edition of the Bible was published in 1800-1801, extant copies are still preserved, notably the one in the Carey Library of Serampore College. Carey translates the title ‘Gospel According to Matthew’, as follows : শুভ সমাচার সাধু মাতিউর প্রণীত । প্রণীত means “as applied by” or “written by”, at least in the King James Version. ‘Gospel’ which means “good news” is translated as *samachar*, a Sanskrit word which etymologically means “the state of going forth”;<sup>3</sup> hence *samachar* now tends to be replaced with *khobar*, an Arabic or Persian word.

## Conclusions

Dineshchandra Sen wrote for the first time about the role played by Carey and his associates in the formation of Bengali prose. Sen’s observations are faultless. Notable is Sen’s thesis of the evolution of a post-Carey Bengali prose style based on omission of verbs, a stylistic or syntactical omission that almost aphoristically condenses the physical amount of utterance in accordance with the phonological practice of the Bengali language.. Consider the line (Matthew) 13: Ye are the salt of the earth. The be-verb “are” does not appear in Carey’s translation which reads : তোমরা জগতের লবণ । There is no ‘হও’ or ‘হইলে’ in Carey’s Bengali translation: the line does not read like তোমরা হও জগতের লবণ ।

But we have to reject Sen’s other observation, or at least accept it with caution. The development of Bengali prose is certainly not only due to the English (or Carey’s efforts in particular). Sen says,

They not only stimulated our intellectual awakening in the various departments of knowledge but were themselves the pioneers in the field of Bengali prose, writing many instructive treatises on a variety, of subjects in our language.<sup>4</sup>

How Bengali was actually spoken, and in what way Bengali prose injunctions or cases were made in the fields of commercial and agrarian revenue for instance would also contribute to the phonological modifications of inscription. The adoption and circulation of modern Bengali prose style may have far more complicated roots.

But doctrinally or at least theoretically Carey may have inducted a very radically different notion from the origins of Christianity one that has not recurred very

<sup>3</sup> Gyanendra Mohan Das. Dictionary of the Bengali Language. 1994. p.2010.

<sup>4</sup> Dinesh Chandra Sen. *Bengali Prose Style. 1800-1857*. Calcutta University Press: Kolkata. 1921.



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significantly in the Bengali language. The apocalyptic word is new to Sanskrit based Bengali. Carey translation of Matthew's promise that the word of Christ will be seen till and even beyond "the end of the world" – or as Carey translates in the first edition of the Bengali Matthew: জগতের লোপ পর্যন্ত is of much theoretical import. The Sanskrit scriptures in all their manifests, including the kind of enrichment deriving upon tantric thought, do not have any notion of apocalypse. The apocalyptic element gives qwaan emtirely novel insight into the nature of spirit, that neither the Greeks, nor hindus knew. 'লোপ পর্যন্ত' not প্রলয়। *Lop* is not destruction; neither is it extinction but an end which is also ontologically real. How far the idea of *lop* has inspired Islamic and Sufi prose or poetry, who also speak about it, is debatable. The phrase 'last judgement' does appear in folk Sufi lyrics for example. But Bengali Hindu prose ( like Bankim's personal essays or even Tagore's sociological letters) does not often use apocalyptic phraselogy.

## Reflections on Torulata Dutt and the Literary Scene

*Sumita Naskar*

With the English poems of Torulata Dutt (1856-1877) "Indian English poetry graduated from imitation to authenticity." She was the first Indian woman to write and publish both in English and French. In fact the number of women writers in Bengal was higher compared to other linguistic areas mainly because of the early introduction of the female education and the series of movements conducted by stalwarts like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Kesab Chandra Sen. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, quite appropriately hailed by Tagore as "the inaugurator of the modern age in India", indeed, the morning star of the Indian renaissance, was a pioneer in religious, educational, social and political reforms.

The Raja's essay on "A Defence of Hindu Theism" 1817 may be regarded as the first original publication of significance in the history of Indian English Literature. Raja Ram Mohan Roy launched vigorous movements to reform the popular Hinduism and to abolish some of the socio-religious practices, including the *Sati* system. While he wanted to revive the pristine purity of Hinduism as found in the Upanishads, he was also one of the first Indians to plead eloquently for the introduction of English education in India, which he believed was the main agency of modernization. In his persuasive letter on English Education addressed to the Governor-General, Lord Amherst in 1823, the Raja argued most forcefully against the establishment of a Sanskrit school in preference to one imparting English education-

"..... the Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such has been the policy of the British legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the government it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of education.... embracing... useful sciences which may be accomplice by employing a few gentlemen of talent and learning educated in Europe and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus." (British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance. 162)

Together with David Hare, the British watch-maker turned educationist and Edward Hyde-East, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bengal the Raja established in 1816 an Association to promote European learning and science. This was the first step towards the founding of Hindu College at Calcutta on 20th January 1817 (It started with 100 students) and in less than forty years became the Presidency College in 1855, the Premier Educational Institution of Bengal. Ram Mohan Roy also founded at his own expense a school in Suripara (near Calcutta)

to teach English to boys (in 1816-1817). He also founded another school in Calcutta called the Anglo-Hindu school in 1822.

The British Government resolution of 7th March 1835 declared that – “the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European Literature and science among the natives of India, and all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone”.<sup>1</sup> Thus in 1835 English language was given a new status in Indian society. It should be borne in mind that the year 1857 is important because that was the year when India registered her first violent protest against British rule. Incidentally, it was also the year that saw the establishment of three universities – one in Calcutta, the other in Bombay other in Madras. These seats of learning, as we all know, were instrumental in ushering in a renaissance in the political, social cultural and literary spheres of Indian life.

After the Raja's death in 1833 many intellectuals inspired by his leadership carried out his message. Some of these English educated thinkers and activists were Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Kesab Chandra Sen, Dwarkanath Tagore, Debendranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, David Hare, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and many others in Bengal.

The impact of Brahma Samaj (established in August 1828) as well as the powerful writing of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee created an atmosphere more congenial to the expression of women in Bengal than in other parts of the country – majority of the women writers belonged to the enlightened English educated families which were the early champions of female emancipation.

Women writers were generally patronized by the editor and publishers. They were read with enthusiasm by the general public, though not always considered respectfully by the established critics. These writers, many of them as gifted as their male counter parts, came from the educated middle class. Among these writers were Anupama Devi (1882-1958), Nirupama Devi (1853-1951), a Bengali novelist. Some of her well known works are *Annappurnar Mandir* (1913) and *Didi* (1915). Both of them hailed from conservative Brahmin families. Both ladies defended the traditional Hindu values, particularly the norms of conjugal life and of widowhood.

These were writers like Sita Devi (1895-1974) and Shanta Devi (1894-1988), Priyambada Devi (1871-1935) – all from educated Brahmo families, who shared progressive ideas and were champions of female emancipation. Svarna Kumari Devi (1864-1933) belonged to a wealthy Brahmo family, Kamini Ray (1864-1933), a poetess, who composed poems highlighting her personal love and its frustration.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_Education\\_Act\\_1835](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Education_Act_1835) [18.03.2011]

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The Bengali poetess Prasannamayee Devi (1857-1939) and Girindramohini Dutta (1858-1924) and Mankumari Basu (1863-1943) hailed from the elite families and each of them received encouragement in the literary pursuits from her family. By and large women were not allowed to participate in literary activities. In those days men and women were not encouraged to mix freely with each other. The friendship between Biharilal and Kadambari Devi or between Harinarayan Apte and Kashibai ought to be regarded as exceptions.

Nevertheless in the early years of twentieth Century literary activities were still dominated by male men writers. In 1870 appeared the Dutt Family Album, which may be regarded as the only example of a family anthology in Indian English poetry – containing 187 poems by three Dutt brothers – Govin Chunder Dutt, Hur Chundra Dutt and Girish Chunder as well as their cousin Omesh Chunder. The Dutt family were descendents of Rosmay Dutt, who had been a lieutenant of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The Dutt family had abjured Hinduism in favour of Christianity. (It was Tarulata's father Guvin Chunder Dutt who has visited England with his family and had even thought of settling down there). These poets, the Dutt brothers, considered their Indian material as something poetically serviceable. Their major pre-occupation in the field of poetry are Nature (natural beauty or scenic description), Christian sentiments, Indian history and legend. Like the poets of earlier generation they are perfectly satisfied by imitating the British Romantics, for instance, when Govin Chunder, addressing the spirit of Romance asks, "who hath not seen thee, fair one, when the day/urges his coursers over the dappled clouds" ('A Farewell to Romance') he is obviously echoing Keat's apostrophe to Autumn.

Similarly, in contemplating a Himalayan peak Girish Chunder Dutt can only repeat all the appropriate Wordsworthian responses, including, "peaceful thoughts and calm delight/And soothing hopes and sadness mild." (Sonnet – 'Like a great temple'). Girish Chunder's poetical compositions are soaked in Wordsworthian sentiments and Shelleyan yearnings. The Dutt Family Album certainly attempts to include Keat's pictorial power.

Hur Chunder Dutt's sonnet entitled 'India' possesses all the correct sentiments "I love thee with a boundless love land of my birth" but contains little evidence of actual personal involvement. One feels that the words are just touching the exterior but intensity of feeling is missing.

However, it ought to be noted that the Dutt Family Album exhibits mere technical competence bereft of freshness and genuineness of response. The poets appear to toe the line of the British Romantics minus their flights of fancy, colourful musings and musical cadence and classical references.

It was with Torulata Dutt that Indian English poetry moves away from mere imitation to authenticity, from emulation to originality. A refreshing note, a breath

of fresh air enters Indian English poetry with Toru, the third and youngest child of Govin Chunder Dutt. Torulata born a Hindu was baptized along with the other members of her family in 1862. Under her father's tutelage Toru learned English at a very early age. Reading and Music was her chief hobbies. Toru recalls in her letter to her British friend, Mary Martin, that she read Milton's *Paradise Lost* in childhood with her brother and sister until they had learnt the first book and part of the second book by heart. Her father vividly describes his close mental and emotional bond with her and praises her remarkable memory – "She could repeat almost every piece she translated by heart".

Toru's mother imparted what may be called a kind of formative informal education – a child's romantic journey into the heart of ancient India. Her mother, Kshetramoni Dutt, inspired her childhood with the ancient lays of India. It is true that it was her father who introduced Toru to a highly anglicized education, to Christianity and encourages her to master French, English as well as Sanskrit Literatures. Nevertheless, under Kshetramoni's tutelage Toru travelled deep into Indian myths and legends. (As envisaged Toru Dutts's later works *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*). It should be borne in mind that both the parents stimulated the imaginations of the budding poetess during the formative years of her life.

One of the most positive forces in Toru's life which shaped her creative ability was her visit to Europe in 1869 with her sister Aru Dutt. (Toru and Aru were the first Indian girls to undertake such voyage). Toru spent a year in France studying French and was thereafter in England for three years. Returning to India in 1873, Toru Dutt died of consumption four years later at the tender age of twenty one (she died in the year 1877).

A striking pen-portrait of Toru Dutt emerges from one of her father's sonnets about his three children (Abju, Toru's eldest brother and Aru, her elder sister) :

Most loving is my eldest and I love him most; amongst a man in seeming, yet a child / And may it long be thus! I would not boast; My next, the beauty of my home, is meek; Than her dear brother; brow and blushing cheek Her nature show serene and pure and mild / As evening's early star. And the last of all, puny and elf-like, with disheveled tresses self willed and shy, never heeding that I call / Intend to pay her tenderest – addressed to bird or cat, - but most intelligent, this is the family which me to lent. (The Dutt Family Album. 201)

Toru writes about her father with deep affection and laughs away his protectiveness of her with tender indulgence. Toru writes, "I am not allowed to sing often and even when papa does permit me, he adds that I must sing very gently. Papa is so careful, I tell him, he should keep me in a glass case, for I am not

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half so delicate as he makes me out to be, or is afraid that I am .... The slightest cool breeze makes him order me to wrap something about me". (Life and Letters of Toru Dutt.111)

Toru Dutt was born in Calcutta in 1856. She was a descendent from the Dutt of Rambagan, an old orthodox and distinguished Hindu Kayastha family. This family was one of the earliest in Calcutta to be radically influenced by British colonialist and missionary discourse. Toru's paternal grandfather, Rasamay Dutt, was an active advocate of English education in the early 19th Century. Rasamay Dutt's life has been described as a landmark in the history of the transformation of Hindu society under the influence of the English.

Toru's father, Govin Chunder Dutt was one of Rasamay Dutt's five sons. He brought into his own life and family, his father's (Rasamay Dutt's) commitment to all things British. Govin Chunder rose to be the Assistant Controller-General of Accounts. He claimed that Indians lacked all kind of opportunities in the British Government and he resigned from office. After his resignation, Toru's father devoted his life to religious and literary studies. Much later his life Govin Chunder Dutt was appointed an honorary Magistrate and Justice of Peace in Calcutta, and a Fellow of Calcutta University. He was a poet and a linguist whose works include – 'The Loyal Hours' (1876), 'Cherry Stones' (1881) and several poems in The Dutt Family Album (1870).

The whole Dutt family converted to Christianity in 1862 and their new faith marginalized the Dutt from the conservative Hindu community. It should be emphasized that this alienation and loneliness caused by marginalization was one of the strongest forces behind Toru Dutt's creative imagination.

Romesh Chunder Dutt in his poem, 'The Hindu Convert to his wife', laments the contempt with which his community regarded his conversion to Christianity. That Toru also suffered a similar hurt at being ostracized is evident in her letters to her English friend Miss Martin from Cambridge.

The fifty odd letters, Toru wrote to Miss Martin; reveal a very lively personality, a dynamic person who is cognizant of all that is happening around her – in the garden of their Baugmaree House as well as all that is taking place in the social scene. Her letters include the usual school girl gossip about the trivialities of daily life – news of a calf being born and the killing of a large snake, describing a typical 'Hindoo marriage', commenting on her own daily activities which includes studying the Mahabharata and the Bible, mastering Sanskrit, translating French poems and one letter finding her demanding a Mosquito curtain for her canaries; lamenting the death of her loving cat; but there is something much more : a sad awareness of the passing of time and strange intimations of maturity; as for instance, when Toru declares – "I am getting quite old, 20 plus some odd months and with such an old-fashioned face that English ladies take me for thirty".

For one living such sheltered life, Toru shows a surprisingly unusual interest in the social and political scene. For instance, when a European, who had killed his stable boy is reported to have been fined only £2 she commented indignantly, "you see how cheap the life of an Indian is in the eyes of an English judge".

Toru's observation on the books she reads show a well developed critical faculty. She wonders why Hardy's heroines "generally marry the men they loved the least." The fact that she was very well read is evident from most of her letters to Miss Martin. She considered Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond* "a masterpiece" and adds in another letter "Les Miserable is one of the most difficult French books that I have read; Victor Hugo seems to prefer hard and unusual words to words more in use". Again she pointed out that "The Life of Charlotte Bronte" by Mrs. Gaskell, "induced me to read some more of Miss Bronte's works. Shirley is well written and interesting, Villette is a failure....."

An impish sense of humour too breaks out at times, for instance, on being chided by an elderly relative for not getting married Toru replies demurely, "I was only waiting for your permission."

Incidentally, Toru Dutt is the first Indian English poet to make an extensive use of Indian myth and legend, though scattered references to these had been employed by her predecessors. Toru's treatment of these legends reveals, on the whole, an instinctive understanding of the spirit underlying them. As a recent Christian convert living in a half-anglicized environment at home, she occasionally betrays certain inadequacies. She sings of Savitri's matchless wifely devotion, her faith in the omnipotence of fate and her belief in 'maya', she also refers to Suneetee's enunciation of the doctrine of Karma and Prehlad's pantheism with an insiders' sense of conviction. In 'The Royal Ascetic and The Hind' Toru is tempted at the conclusion to include a Christian Sermon on Divine Love.

Her deep and abiding faith in Christianity sustained her when two grave tragedies of her life overtook her. Toru's elder brother Abju died in 1865 aged fourteen years. In July 1874 her elder sister Aru died at the age of twenty. Deeply shaken, Toru, left all alone, found solace only in Christianity: "The lord has taken Aru from us. It is a sore trial for us but his will be done. We know he does all things for our good." The harrowing and untimely deaths of Abju and Aru haunted her. She herself suffered from consumption. Nevertheless, being a highly spirited woman she did not give up. She fondly recalls her days spent in the continent. In a letter dated 13th May, 1876, Toru confides to Miss Martin – "Papa is so pleased to read your letter, after reading them his invariable remark is : 'Let go return to England; where in Calcutta will you get such warm-hearted friends, Toru?'"

Toru Dutt's attitude to England is ambivalent. The burden of her letter is, "I wish I was there," and "I so long to be there." Toru misses the free life that they had led in England. Her letters reveal certain wistfulness about England.

## Reflections on Torulata Dutt and the Literary Scene

But her study of Sanskrit during the closing years of her life brought her nearer to the very source of her Indian Culture or her own culture; she ceased to be a "Brown English woman". She now realizes "how grand, how sublime, how pathetic our legends are," and during the last few months of her life, Toru confesses "strange to say I do not much relish the idea of leaving Calcutta, I am very fickle, for it was I who regretted the most leaving England. I wonder why this is so." There is no doubt about the fact that Toru loved her motherland deeply.

Torulata Dutt's tragedy is that she died just when her talent was maturing with her discovery of her roots. Of her two collections, only one appeared during her lifetime and that was *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876) which comprises of 165 lyrics by nearly a 100 French poets translated into English by Toru (only 8 poems are by her sister Aru). The poems speak eloquently about her originality and reveal her flair for the language.

Toru Dutt's *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) published posthumously shows how Keatsian in pace was the progress achieved by Toru during the last two years of her life. Two of these ballads revolve around the archetypes of Indian womanhood, Sita and Savitri. Four other narrate the legends of youngsters – Dhruva, Buttoo, Sindhu and Prehlad; one recounts a legend about the goddess Uma. King Bharata and Lakshman are the other characters that figure here. Toru's remarkable achievement lies in immersing herself in Sanskrit and expressing all that she mastered from the ancient lays in English.

As this long list reveals Toru Dutt is the first Indian English poet to make an extensive use of Indian legend and myth though scattered references to these had been employed by her predecessors. Her treatment of these myths and legends reveal an instinctive understanding of the spirit underlying them. She writes "Are not Sita's conversation with the old hermitess, Anwusuya, beautiful? Her description of her own birth and her marriage with Rama are exquisite. We are now reading *Sakuntala* in Sanskrit. It is very difficult but very well written and described the calm, peaceful and rustic life led by the ancient anchorites and devotees.

Toru Dutt's poetry reveals a superb blend of the East and West. In 'Savitri' she takes up the Mahabharata and we find the inclusion of the self-sacrificing and selfless, most obliging image of the epic heroines, those deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the traditional Hindu girl, as the correct form of behaviour expected from women. Together with this submissiveness and blind wifely devotion one also notices a strong will, determination and dynamism in these epic heroines. Toru's Savitri and Sita are strong-minded and independent. The spirit of individualism within her and the Hindu ideals taught to her (in her childhood) both are to be found in these characters created by Toru in her literary works. Toru's deep faith in Christianity also finds perfect expression in these figures she



has composed. Her compositions reflect her journey into European Literature and culture. Her inclusion of the Christian element along with the Hindu myths, legends and sentiments emphasize her cosmopolitan outlook. Toru's "Buttoo" casts aside the Hindu belief that education or learning is the birth right of the upper castes, or the Higher Caste (the Brahmins). Through the lower caste Buttoo, the poet shows the man's true worth depends on his own character, talents and diligence, certainly not on his birth.

"The question is, - not wealth or place  
But gifts well used, or gifts abused."

The most significant formative influence on Toru Dutt was her father, her beloved mentor, who introduced her to a highly anglicized education, to Christianity, and encouraged her to study French, English and Sanskrit Literatures. Toru's visit to Europe for four years (Toru and Aru were the first Indian girls to undertake such a voyage) was another positive force in the poet's life. Along with this, loneliness and alienation caused by marginalization made Toru retreat into the world of creative imagination.

Extra ordinarily talented, nurtured by some of the great literatures of the world – the ancient Sanskrit epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, French and British Romantics such as Victor Hugo, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, the Victorian novelists (particularly the Bronte sisters and Elizabeth Barrett Browning) Toru Dutt's creative imagination took full flight.

Her Christian faith does not come into conflict with her appreciation and attraction to the "deep magic" of the Hindu epics. She was an Indian poet writing in English. Well-versed in both Indian and European Literature her works reveal a superb blend of both Literatures. Toru's roots are in her motherland and she agreeably responds to the land's heart-beats of the antique tradition.

We ought to bear in mind that in terms of education and upbringing Toru was rather unusual in the mid-nineteenth Century Calcutta. It is true that Calcutta as the progressive capital of British India in its heyday was dynamic with change. Macaulay's Minute of Education of 1835 propagated European education, Christianity and socio-religious reform in Bengal of which women's reforms were many. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 caused a revival of Evangelism. Simultaneously, nationalist movements that were developing across India also advocated Hindu women's reforms.

Despite all this, the majority of conservative Hindus clung persistently to the tradition that confined the Hindu women within the house in the roles of wife and mother.

There was also the strongly held religious superstition that a literate woman would cause the death of her husband, and be burdened by the blight of widowhood.

## Reflections on Torulata Dutt and the Literary Scene

English was sanctioned as important for Hindu men who were required in the public world of employment to transact with the British, it was not deemed necessary for Hindu women who were spiritual guardians of Hindu culture. In the world, imitation of, and adaptation to western norms was considered extremely necessary; whilst at home they were tantamount to annihilation of one's very Identity. The English educated woman (a rare almost imaginary breed) was snored in contemporary Bengali farces and satires as promiscuous unfeminine and unfit for domestic chores.

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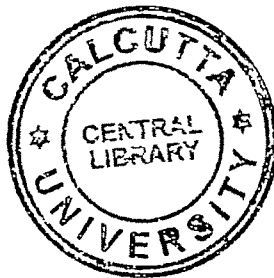
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## Voices from the Margin: 'North-East' Narrations

*Dr. Mitali Goswami*

*Ms. Jasnea Sarma*

"I say  
When the going gets tough  
The tough get going.  
Who says borders and fences,  
And sainer shah, barbed-wires and all  
Can keep us away huh?  
As far as the buying and selling's concerned  
All on the same side of any fence I say!  
We know how these things are done you know!"  
( Border Narrations 11)  
Esther Syiem

India's 'North East', a veritable Anthropologist's paradise, which shares its borders with six countries, connected to the 'mainland' by a mere 20 km 'chicken neck' provides an excellent site of border perspective. It provides conflicting representation of life at borders which include the voice of Assamese nationals of Chinese origins who were displaced from their roots in Assam during the 1962 Indo-China war, or border narratives from Meghalaya, or Karbi Anglong that invoke debates of fluid and symbolic borders, of peripheral identities of terror and trauma and violence.

Taken together these representations create a script rarely visible in official and political discretions of border mappings. Yet these are real voices and narratives from people's living memories that can no longer be ignored or swept under the carpet. These voices must now be taken within the context of "nation building", national political apparatus and foreign policy considerations. Sadly enough, despite the advent of globalization, regionalization, unionization and the dreams of a "borderless world", International Relations theory and practice in India still functions under a 'Westphalian' mindset of hard borders. It erases sociological or anthropological studies from the actual sites of the "marginalized" borderland, the so called 'North-East' India. It is in the context of borderland politics that the above quoted poem by Esther Syiem, an eminent poet from the North-Eastern state of Meghalaya, becomes representative. She concludes the poem saying,

"And the cat and mouse game  
That they play all the time?  
What about them you ask again?  
What about them my mainland friend?

Simply border hazards, if you ask us.  
Best ignored, if you ask me.”

Need one say more one is tempted to ask? Indeed, if it was not for a series of events that began from Prince Charles of Spain conquering central Europe to declare himself King, followed by the thirty years war to the declaration of the treaty of Westphalia in 1648, Europe would never have received its best gift – the State. The state with its five well known prerequisites became the only form of polity ever to cover the entire surface of the earth. Because most states thereafter functioned under what could be defined as a ‘sovereignty bound thinking’, the need to jealously guard borders and territory became imperative for its survival. Borders and territorial divisions have therefore been a major influence on how the normative and legal patterns of international law and politics evolved.

Thereafter colonial policies have also effectively destroyed traditional institutions of social change and inter-community relationship by drawing fixed demarcated territorial lines. Therefore it came as no surprise that the “national identities” of the new states were articulated through the system of Majoritarianism and through the expression of borders. As such national elites ignored the thousands of years old social, economic and cultural links that had existed between India’s ‘North-East’ and its neighbouring countries and destroyed traditional trade routes and established patterns of labour migration.

Today this traditional challenge has been reinforced by new developments in global politics with the formation of transnational, multilateral, and regional organizations. As the world turns more global with increasing space for international politics and cultural participation, domestic politics, on the contrary, often seeks to tighten expressions of nationalism in borders. Most find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that the experiences of people who live in border areas under the cross current of two different traditions are comfortable with being culturally tied to people from neighbouring countries.

A border in the simplest terms is a notional line, inviting discussion as to what it separates and what are the possibilities and consequences of crossing it. On some borders the two sides may be mirror images of each other and on others, one side may be desperately trying to differentiate itself from the other, or again, one side may stand marginalized, made peripheral. It must also be noted that most of the conflicts of the latter half of the 20th century have revolved around borders though the key issues have been varied ranging from economic resources, labour migration, religion, ethnicity etc. Consequently the seriousness of border and borderlines cannot be overlooked in world politics and post colonial international relations as well as theory. As such it is not surprising that issues relate to borders have found their way into contemporary literature and literary theory.

Here we would like to draw attention to the issue of border dynamics and conflict as articulated in three contemporary Assamese texts which project border

conflict at three different levels respectively. The fact that all three texts have the north east as their locales is of course no coincidence. Border writing in Assamese and the rest of the north-east is a fairly recent phenomenon as far as our knowledge is concerned yet the issues that have been raised in the selected texts need to be recognized as troubled and debate worthy areas.

### **Territorial Borders**

The first text that needs discussion in any border discourse related to the North East is Rita Choudhury's *Makam*, a text that examines contesting degrees of ethno-identities and sub-nationalisms and the impact of vertical level state decisions on territorial border regions. In this case the border regions being, Assam and China, the residents of which had traditional linkages of trade, ethnicity and migration. The text highlights how State/Nation interference has proved to have a marginalizing and dehumanizing affect on a group of people. To be very brief *Makam* depicts the story of the Chinese people who are forced by conditions of abject poverty to migrate to Assam to work in the newly set up tea gardens, of Assam and their setting up a township named Makum in Upper Assam. The novel depicts the emergence of a new sub-nationality of Sino-Assamese; mostly through inter marriage, who wants nothing but peaceful assimilation into the Assamese community and productive co-existence with the people of Assam. But this dream of a home is rudely broken by the Indo-Chinese war of 1962. It is during the Chinese aggression that this community is slotted as Chinese spies, uprooted and deported to Deoli in Rajasthan and then to Hong Kong where they have to pick up the threads of their lives and come to terms with the fate of being a dispossessed people. What is of significance here apart from the deportation and regrouping at Hong Kong, is the human angle of the tragedy, the tearing asunder of the Sino-Assamese families, of husband from wife, of siblings from each other that characterized the process of the deportation.

In what can be termed as a dark chapter of Assam history, the novel traces how people from China are brought to Assam by the British almost a century prior to India's independence to work in the tea gardens of Assam. The author shows how a new Sino-Assamese Community develop mainly through intermarriage and become an integral part of the Assamese society and live peacefully till 1962, when as an aftermath of war, this community has to face the brunt of suspicion only because their roots can be traced to China though they are Assamese in heart and soul. The novel delves into the human aspect of border conflict by showing how an entire community is uprooted, deprived of home and property, their lives transformed and how a well off group of people are made paupers almost overnight. The novel highlights the impact of vertical level state decisions on the private histories of people affected by turns in public history. With her acknowledgement that almost all her characters are from real life and the events from the living

memory of people she has known and interacted with in many of her interviews, the writer has effectively bridged the gap between fact and fiction and made the narrative an integral part of contemporary political discourse. She has raised relevant issues of border politics and conflict that demand timely management. As one reads the text one is reminded of the lines penned in the context of the Indo-Chinese war by the Bard of Brahmaputra, the late Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, that seem to aptly sum up the meta-textual matter of *Makam*.

'koto pitri putra hara hol        (how many a father lost a son)  
 Kun matrir buku xuda hol        (how many a mother's heart was torn)  
 Ronga hendur kaar musa gol ( how many a red vermillion dot was erased )  
 Kaar baxona opurna rol        (how many a dream went unfulfilled)

The novel thus demands a reading in terms of the horrifying colonial aftermath that influenced the policy makers of the 60s. It draws attention to the inhuman treatment of a minority people who were in no way a threat to the socio-cultural fabric of Assam. The text prioritizes the intrusive policy of the centre that allowed the emotions of both the Assamese and the Sino-Assamese to be trampled underground. The novel must be read in continuum with the history of the Indo-Chinese war and its immediate and far reaching effects on both sides of the border. One is acutely reminded, on reading the novel of the perennial problem of marginalization that people living in border areas generally have to face and how little the experience of this people have mattered to mainland policy makers. Significantly the text re-visits a site where the personal freedom of people has been tampered with and considered irrelevant. In exposing the state of the poor in China and their subsequent dehumanization in India, the text highlights the pro-mainstream ideology that rule policy makers in any given society. One can only conclude with the sentiments expressed by Rita Choudhury herself,

"Justice delayed is justice denied and besides restitution of property or compensation, the government should come out with a public apology and acknowledge them as Indian citizens." Rita Choudhury (author)  
 (The Telegraph, 26.10.10)

But as Homi Bhaba would say, any discourse on border and border lines is fraught with ambivalence and one needs to study the experiences of territorial borders in the larger paradigms multiculturalism, globalization, representation of nationalism and statehood. And this brings us to the second segment of our discourse where we allude to a recently published short story by Imran Hussain entitled 'Bosikaran'; where border discourse is the thrust in the context of the threat that an unresolved border issue brings forth.

'Bosikaran' (an Assamese word which means to enchant) plays on the loss incurred by the recipient populace in the situation of cross border immigration from Bangladesh to Assam. Once again it is war, the Indo-Pak war of 1971, when

East Pakistan became Bangladesh that pushes the region into yet another border drama. It is an event when the borders of the north eastern part of the sub-continent were in turmoil and were reconstituted. The same event also catapulted mass scale immigration from Bangladesh into Assam resulting not only in identity crises but also a duping of the recipient populace by both the immigrants and the policy makers. In this story also, the writer posits a situation that can occur only in a border state. And in this case the state is Assam. We are taken to a sub-urban area of Assam, where the hero, a writer by profession happens to live. Set with the backdrop of large scale immigration into Assam because of a porous border, the story, which is, at one level a political allegory, plays upon the upcoming writer's hidden desire for fame and quick success and how this hidden desire is tapped and used to gull the writer by a Bangladeshi woman posing as a quack healer who deals out amulets and charms for quick benefits and success. The story unravels how little by little, driven by his thirst for fame and the possibility of its gratification through the Dhakaya woman's formula for success, the writer succumbs to her cunning and persuasion, as she connives to get into his house, orders his wife around and makes away with cash and kind without the writer realizing for an instant how he is being duped. In an interesting turn of events the writer is even shown speaking the Dhakaya language to the great delight of the woman. The story is an insightful comment on another kind of cross border dynamics that posits a threat to the indigenous identity, language and culture. The text articulates a situation typical in today's Assam and its border politics. This text looks at cross border migration in sharp contrast to the position and concept of border politics posited by the text cited in the first case. But again we would draw attention to the historical space, more specifically, the pre and post independence positions of identity formation, more significantly, with the agency of vote – politics coming into play in the latter text. In the post independence scenario border politics is seen to reach a new realm of conflict that has strong imperialistic undertones. One is tempted to ask whether mainstream politics will continue to turn a blind eye until power positions between the immigrant and the native stand completely restructured.

Living in a border state certainly has its hazards but not always from across borders as the concluding part of the paper will show.

### **Symbolic Borders**

The third perspective is one where regional and national interests or ethnicities clash and a perceived or symbolic border stands as a barrier to contact thereby giving rise to new areas of conflict. Agreed that such borders are conceptual or abstract borders and exist only on the mental or metaphorical landscape but they still encompass major binaries like rich/poor, male/female, private/public etc. Though existing at the metaphorical level the potency of such borders can never



be belittled. Perhaps the appropriate text to exemplify the conflict that arises because of symbolic borders would be Mausumi Kondoli's 'Lambada Nasor Xexot' ('When the Lambada was over'), where the writer uses two locales and expertly weaves her narrative between a remote village in Karbi Anglong and the North campus of the University of Delhi. The protagonist is a young boy from Karbi Anglong, a student and aspiring model, set apart from the rest of his classmates for his oriental looks and manners and natural talent for music and dance, qualities found in almost every boy or girl from the North East. He is lapped up by the world of Delhi fashion where people eye both him and his ethnic jacket with a voyeuristic gaze. He is marketed, like a muga shawl or a Naga jacket but not befriended or given unconditional acceptance into the mainstream social world of Delhi. As such, he suffers from a strange dilemma of neither being able to leave the alluring city nor being able to fit in completely, feeling within himself a fragmentation, a fractured self that pines away for Delhi, when at home and for home when at Delhi. What he feels is a strange duality of being neither here nor there, of existing in the fringes with the perceived or symbolic borderline looming large in his perception as well as in the perception of the main stream society where he yearns to be accepted. Forming the backdrop of the story is the increasing marketability, and possibilities of trade of the region and the regional. The text highlights the almost irrevocable centre/margin divide and the crossroads in which thousands of students from the North-East find themselves every year. It is a position which is a threat to his/her self determination and individual personhood. In this context perhaps the symbolic borderland merits as much attention and management as the territorial. The text articulates how border perception at the symbolic level distorts identity which is something deep, basic, abiding and foundational and needs to be, cultivated, supported and preserved as any Anthropologist would assert.

Finally it needs to be mentioned that this write up only attempts to highlight situations where border theory or concepts of border management can be further discussed and debated. It does not offer any solution, for each border, whether territorial or symbolic has its own unique problem areas and its own unique solutions. At best one may conclude that the most important way of looking at territorial politics lies at the territorial lines themselves. In many ways the lived traditions in territorial/symbolic borders break the theoretical underpinnings of vastly debated notions of national societies. One may only sum up that life at borderlands is cosmopolitanism and coalition at the local level and it tells the best tale moving beyond borders.

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## Circumventing and Transgressing the *antahpur*: The 'Voice' of *Chhoti Bahu* in Guru Dutt's *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*

Dr. Shoma A. Chatterji

### Background

After the dismal commercial and critical failure of *Kaagaz Ke Phool*, Guru Dutt asked M. Sadiq direct *Chaudhvin Ka Chand* (1960), before making the elegiac *Sahib, Bibi Aur Ghulam* credited for direction to his long-term collaborator and scriptwriter Abrar Alvi. Adapted from a classic Bengali novel authored by Bimal Mitra. The novel had already been adapted for film in Bengali by Kartik Chattopadhyay, a reasonably successful director of his time, in 1956. In this film, Uttam Kumar played Bhootnath, Sumitra Devi, an out-of-work actress of earlier times, played Chhoti Bahu and Anubha Gupta, another senior actress, played Jaba. Dutt may have read the original Bengali novel. This prompted him to buy the rights to make the film in Hindi from the author.

About the audience response to the film, Dutt wrote :

*My decision to take up the novel Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam for filming was taken with a pinch of salt by film prophets. Of course, the introduction on the screen of a pious wife taking to drinking even for the sake of winning over her husband was fraught with great peril. But I took the plunge as, at the base of it all was a fascinating novel. I must say that the press hailed this attempt with an acclaim, which was beyond my expectations. This public reaction was very encouraging on the whole. In its early screenings in Bombay, there was uproar against only two particular scenes. The first of these was the one in which Chhoti Bahu, out of an affectionate affinity between them, rests her head on the lap of Bhootnath. The second one was the scene in which she tells her husband: "Allow me to take the last sip of liquor. Only for the last time. I have decided to give it up completely." We deleted these scenes.<sup>1</sup>*

The story is set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century *zamindari* milieu of the Choudhury household. It is seen through the eyes of the educated but naïve-to-the-point-of-being-a-simpleton Bhootnath who arrives in colonial Calcutta looking for work while British troops loot the shops. At times compared to Satyajit Ray's *Jalsaghar* (1956 – *The Music Room*), as a commentary on Bengal's decaying feudal system, Dutt's film is a romantic and a somewhat nostalgic tale of a bygone era, presenting the past and the future through the contradictory figures of the two women in the

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper, Darius, *In Black and White – Hollywood and the Melodrama of Guru Dutt*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2005, *Ibid.* p.114.

film. Unlike Ray's dignified and cultured *zamindar*, the Choudhuries of *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* evoke little sympathy. In 1962, the film won *Filmfare* awards in four categories : Best Film, Best Director (Abrar Alvi), Best Cinematography (V.K. Murthy) and Best Actress (Meena Kumari.) The film gained entry along with Satyajit Ray's *Mahanagar* at the Berlin Film Festival in 1963, though it did not win any awards there. It was nominated as an Indian entry for the Oscars but did not win any award. It won the President's Silver Medal in 1964 and the "film of the year" award from the Bengal Film Journalists' Association.

### Bimal Mitra

Bimal Mitra (1912-1991) emerged as one of the foremost Bangla novelists of the post Second World War period. Extremely popular, Bimal Mitra was also a prolific writer with over five hundred short stories and a hundred novels to his credit. His other major works include *Begum Mary Biswas*, *Kori Diye Kinlam*, *Ekak Deshak Shatak*, *Pati Param Guru*, *Asami Haajir*, *Shoni Raja Rahu Montri*, *Raja Badal*, *Ami* and *Shesh Prishthai Dekhun*. Bimal Mitra is recognized as the only writer who has narrated through his epics the history of Bengal for over 250 years till her Independence and about 50 years thereafter. The author, a silent lone fighter against social ills, never believed in short-term popularity and official recognition. Although Indira Devi Chowdhurani – the then Vice Chancellor of Viswa Bharati University, expressed that the author should have been awarded the Nobel prize or similar a literary award of equal status for his epic novel *Saheb Bibi Golam*, the author was never officially recognized for his contribution. Because of the vastness and popularity of his literature, Bimal Mitra is an institution unto himself. He is still very popular among all sections of readers and also a respected name in the entertainment media.

The Hindi film was preceded by a Bengali screen version. *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* spans the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, charting the process of decline of the Bengal *zamindari* system, or land ownership system, and its distinctive way of life. It tries to capture the fading away of one social class and the emergence of another. Mitra denies the status of history to the novel. In a preface to the novel, Mitra writes :

*I am principally a storyteller, not a historian. For the sake of storytelling, sometimes history, science or social studies become important. That is what has happened in this case. For the story, I have used material from Calcutta's social and cultural history, and only because such use was indispensable for the story, not because I had anything new to say about history. Here the story is primary, history or anything else is secondary. But if my story is embellished by riding upon the wings of history, I have been ever watchful that history should not be embellished by its involvement with the story.*

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*Constantly I have kept myself tied to the truth. For the story I have used portions of history, it is true, but I have tried to falsify history.*<sup>2</sup>

The opening pages of the novel offer a fascinating and masterly account of the history of Calcutta. The narrator is almost a combination of bard, storyteller, and the grandfather who roots his description to very local landmarks, to names of streets and shops and families as his memory ranges over the past and the present for the benefit of an uninformed younger generation. Rumour mingles with fact, certainty with conjecture. The relaxed tone of the narration and its leisurely pace suggest that memory supplies what formal history cannot – the lived experience of change. (Chakravarty : 174).

Snippets of history are made available in the literary original of *Saheb Bibi Golam*. Calcutta, or rather, Bengal, is referred to as a country (*desh*) with its own history, its own past of almost three centuries. Even the Ganges had a different name then (Chakravarty: 174.) It was then merely a thin stream. Calcutta's origin is associated with the Portuguese, the East India Company, and various other trading groups. Job Charnock, a company officer who married a Brahmin woman, founded Calcutta, earlier called Shutanuti. "One day came the Portuguese. Now you can see them in Murgihata. Half-English, half-Portuguese, they were called Phiringees. They were the first generation of Company clerks. Later they became the Englishmen's servants, cooks and their women the Memsahib's ayahs. Also came the Armenians... With them came the Greeks, the Jews, the Hindus and the Muslims – everybody. Thus was established Calcutta. All this happened in 1690" (Chakravarty: 174).

Mitra obviously did not care for the general population's ignorance of the history of Calcutta and wished to open it out to a wider readership. Bengal's regional identity, always strong, has had an uneasy co-existence with an identity conceived in national terms. What was the driving force that motivated this recuperation of Calcutta's history? It is the image of destruction brought on by the force of post independence industrialism and 'improvement.' The buildings were being demolished under the orders of the Calcutta Improvement Trust, buildings burst with memories and sole reminders of the city's tumultuous past. As the buildings went, so did the memories. There was a strong suggestion of a sense of buildings as spatial metaphors for permanence against the impermanence of time.

The film does away with this outer historical framework and concentrates on the main narrative alone, since the audiovisual medium of cinema made in the national language, Hindi, much after the book was written and long after the time-

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<sup>2</sup> Chakravarty, Sumita. S.: *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema –1947-1987*, 1996. Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.175. (The translation is by Chakravarty herself from the original preface to the novel in Bengali.)

period of the story, would not have lent itself well to a national audience's response and understanding.

Mitra's literary works have always been cinema-friendly and television-friendly in the sense that many of his works have been translated onto celluloid and on the small screen, mostly with slight changes to his original literary work. *Sahib Bibi Golam* has been converted to film at least twice and once for television. Other films and television serials have been adapted from his original literary works. Among the more popular ones are *Kori Diye Kinlaam*, *Mujrim Hazir*, *Stree*, and so on. His focus was in drawing out the lives of women confined to the inner spaces of feudal homes. One of his most widely read works is a compendium of stories on and about such women is *Kanya Paksha*, which however, has never been translated into the film or television medium. However, the late author owes international recognition to the late Guru Dutt whose *Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam* made Mitra famous for all time to come.

An important quality of Mitra's themes is the focus he gave to the women in feudal families in some of his novels. Read in retrospect, they offer at the same time, an informal historical document on the lives of *zamindars* of Bengal and a scathing satire on the culture of the *antahpur*, the space of the inner home the wives and mothers were confined to, meant to control their lives, their relationships and their mobility.

#### Aim :

This paper tries to find out whether the socially coerced and conditioned confinement of women to the *antahpur* really worked in the socio-historical environment of the period the story is set in. The paper explores the validity of the *antahpur*. Did this confinement really work for the women? Or did some of these women find their own ways of transgressing and violating the feudal order of life strictly delineated for them by the patriarchal and feudal culture they were married into?

Did *Chhoti Bahu* manage to break out of the *antahpur*, if not in literal terms, then in emotional terms? This paper will try to examine these questions by placing them in historical and cinematic perspective through a study of the position of women in Bengal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the lack of homogeneity between and among women of the period, their lifestyles, and the place, purpose and history of the *antahpur* vis-à-vis *Chhoti Bahu* and her persistent conflicts. The cinematographic treatment as a complement to the social issue will also be examined. *Chhoti Bahu's* transgression of the rules of the *antahpur* offers a definition of her 'voice.'

#### Synopsis :

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *zamindari* system held sway in Bengal. The Chowdhurys are one such powerful family of landlords who live in a palatial

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home. The men spend all their time living a life of excesses veiled as pleasure. The women of the household are conditioned to accept their subsidiary roles in the family through generations of suffering and humiliation. *Chhoti Bahu* is the sole exception. She is the wife of the younger of the two surviving brothers. Here exquisite beauty has transcended the barrier of her middle-class backdrop to bring her into an aristocratic family through marriage. *Chhoti Bahu* finds it difficult to cope with the world of the Chowdhurys, where her husband spends his nights with prostitutes and has a regular keep in an outhouse in keeping with the tradition and values of the *zamindars*.

She finds a sympathetic soul in Bhootnath, an innocent young man who comes to Calcutta to stay with a distant relative who works in the Chowdhury household. Bhootnath works in the vermillion factory, the brand going by the name of *Mohini sindoor*. He finds himself drawn to Jaba, daughter of the factory owner. *Chhoti Bahu* asks Bhootnath to bring her a packet of *Mohini Sindoor*, in the desperate hope that the magic of the *sindoor* will wean her husband away from his bad habits of wining and womanizing and that he will come home to his wife. When she pleads with her husband to stay home, he ruthlessly taunts her about her orthodox ways. In retaliation, to prove that she can do what the other women do to keep him company, *Chhoti Bahu* takes to drinking. What begins as an act of defiance becomes an obsession till *Chhoti Bahu* becomes an incurable alcoholic. Bhootnath, disturbed by this unexpected turn of events in *Chhoti Bahu's* life, tries his best to wean her away from the path of self-destruction. But in the process, *Chhoti Bahu's* innocent affection for Bhootnath and Bhootnath's genuine concern for her turn into the immediate cause of her destruction. Suspecting her of infidelity, an unpardonable sin in a family of *zamindars* where women are not allowed to step out of the inner quarters except in a *palki* or a thickly curtained, horse-drawn carriage, *Majhle Babu* gets her killed and buried in secret. Bhootnath manages to escape and save himself.

Years later, now happily married to Jaba, an ageing Bhootnath arrives as overseer to supervise the demolition of the palatial mansion. The visit takes him back into the past, telescoping into *Chhoti Bahu's* tragic history. He looks at the once splendid home, now silent and lifeless, a mute witness to a way of life that bore the seeds of destruction within itself. Some workers beckon him to take a look at the skeletal remains of a woman, her wrists still holding the golden bangles she wore. Bhootnath recognizes the bangles. The skeleton is all that remains of the beautiful *Chhoti Bahu*. Bhootnath turns back to his wife waiting outside in a carriage, leaving behind a past forever.

### Analysis

*Sahib, Bibi Aur Ghulam* is based on the literary classic in Bengali named *Sahib, Bibi, Golam*. It deals with the disintegration of a great *zamindari haveli* and a

vanishing lifestyle, as experienced by the author.<sup>3</sup> The film focusses on the encounter between the flamboyant lifestyle and extravaganza of the decadent *zamindari* class – and the work ethics and ideology of the new, rising middle class of the Brahmo community. It describes the slow physical, material and moral degradation of a family and of its class of Bengali Hindu *zamindars* who were feudal, oppressive landowners of the time, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Choudhurys lost everything gradually because of the life of utter debauchery they led, complemented with their total indifference to financial matters. They squandered away their income from lands owned partly by inheritance but mainly through appropriation of lands owned by poor peasants who could not afford to pay their 'tax' on time or took loans for family expenses or for cultivation.

One example of the excesses the Choudhurys indulged in is shown through the lavish feast thrown by them in honour of the 'marriage' of the favourite cat of the masters. Money spent on dancing girls, on drinking parties and in bad investments slowly chipped away their wealth and their riches. It is as if the *zamindars* almost willingly handed over their prime property into the greedy hands of new modern entrepreneurs eagerly waiting for the 'kill.'

The film is narrated entirely in flashback. the dilapidated ruins of the once-grand mansion with a graying Bhootnath, vested officially to supervise the demolition, standing against it used as a beautiful framing device. This film has been compared with Orson Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons* and has 'Viscontian' aspects as seen in the meticulous care with which the period has been brought to life and in the film's undisguised admiration for some of its splendours.<sup>4</sup>

*It was an age of belief and faithlessness. It was an age of truth and falsehood. It was the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the present century. It was a transitory period in the lives of the people passing from the phase of feudalism to that of capitalism. There was a foreign government at the helm of affairs. There was a renaissance in the different departments of the social, political, cultural and religious side of life in Bengal and side by side, there were signs of decadence in the lives of the few, landed, aristocratic families who had been earning their fabulous wealth through the toils of half-fed cultivators of the village.*

*The organization called the Calcutta Improvement Trust was demolishing a big building in order to broaden a small, serpentine*

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<sup>3</sup> Sen, Geeti, *Feminine Fables – Imaging the Indian Woman in Painting, Photography and Cinema*, (Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2002) she mentions in a footnote that in a meeting with the author Bimal Mitra in 1990, he had mentioned that his novel was based on his own experiences of visiting *havelis* in Calcutta during his student days where this pattern of life continued till the 1920s. (p.131).

<sup>4</sup> Yves Thoraval: *The Cinemas of India (1896-2000)*, MacMillan India Ltd, 2000. pp.79-80.



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*lane named Bonomali Sarkar Lane, which connected Bou Bazar Street on the East and Central Avenue on the West. A signboard of the demolition notice of the CIT is seen hanging in front of an old building. A very big Assatha tree is seen having grown in the cracked wall of the building encircling it with its thick roots.*<sup>5</sup>

Scene One: *Labourers are working inside. The atmosphere is desolate and deserted. Late in the noon, an overseer, dressed in khaki shorts, half-shirt and a sola hat on his head, enters the spot where the coolies are working. Bhootnath looks wistfully and sadly at the scene of destruction. He heaves a sigh. As he is engrossed in his thoughts, the sardar or head coolie Charitra Mandal approaches him and asks him some questions.* (Original Screenplay: National Film Archive of India, Pune).

Scene Two : *Bhootnath stands alone in the courtyard of the demolished building. A mysterious voice springs from nowhere –*

Voice: *Saale Babu, Saale Babu, come on....*

Voice: *Bansi.....*

*Bhootnath, mesmerized, moves forward drawn towards where he thinks the voice comes from.*

Scene Two A: *He steps into the debris when female voices reach his ears along with the sound of the grinding stone grinding spices, clothes being washed, utensils being cleaned.* (Original Screenplay: NFAI).

Though both Dutt and Alvi were men, (including Bimal Mitra who wrote the dialogue jointly with Alvi), they had a keen eye for womanly detail, taking in the sights and sounds of housework in its basic elements. Everyday gestures create the ambience for the event happening in the story and the context for the character involved in an everyday gesture. In cinema of the time-image, everyday gestures are important because they foreshadow, underscore and offer background support to things happening or dialogue being exchanged in the foreground. They find distinctive spaces in Dutt's films because, within the narrative format he uses, these non-narrative and non-extensive actions offer unobtrusive pointers to the reading of a character and his/her relationship with other character/s within a particular scene in the film. In these opening scenes marking the beginning of the flashback, the gestures are more important because they do not form any part of the universe Chhoti Bahu inhabits. Unlike normal housewives in middle-class and lower-middle-class Bengali families of the period the film represents, the world of the Chowdhury women excluded housework and everything associated with housework.

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<sup>5</sup> From Original Screenplay of the film at the National Film Archive Script Library, Pune.

*Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* uses individual memory as the structuring consciousness that shapes, orders and reveals a historical past. Bhootnath's memories propel him to more than 30 years in the past, to a time in which it seems that the world for him was whole, alive, and brilliant. The ruins among which he sits and remembers get transformed through a fade-in into an imposing mansion, which serves as an index for power, beauty, and pride. (Chakravarty: 177-178). Bhootnath is filled with guilt as he realizes that he is about to order and supervise over the demolition of the very structure whose walls had once given him food, shelter and emotional fulfillment. It is as if he is still the servant who is afraid of having bitten the hand that once fed him. Bhootnath's class origins, therefore, shape his thinking. Though he has risen in status from his humble beginnings with the feudal class having all but disappeared into the remote pages of history, he continues to cling to a notion of class difference.

### Women of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal vis-à-vis the Women in *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*

Women of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, like women in other regions, were not economically or socially a homogenous group. Their lifestyles and occupations varied depending on whether they were from rich families, from the middle class or poor women. While women of rich families and middle stations stayed in seclusion in the *andarmahals*, (or *antahpur*), the majority were working women, either traditionally self-employed like *napteris*,<sup>6</sup> sweepers, vegetable vendors, fishmongers, maidservants, street singers and dancers and women employed by mercantile firms dealing in seed produce, mustard, linseed, etc.<sup>7</sup> The poorer class of women used whatever time they had left after housework to assist the men in traditional occupations like cultivation, pottery, spinning, basket making, etc. Such participation extended to cultural activities like community singing and dancing during festivals, as well as to *bratas*<sup>8</sup> meant exclusively for women and performed with a view to attaining their aspirations as pious daughters, wives and mothers – mainly as mothers of male children. In other words, every *brata* practiced by girls from a young age was designed for the welfare of others – sons and husbands, and not, repeat not for their own welfare.

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<sup>6</sup> Women from the caste of barbers who came to pair the nails of and apply *alta* (a liquid red dye prepared from the *alaktaka* flower used as a decorative by married women) to the feet of women living in the *andarmahal*.

<sup>7</sup> Speech by Babu Greesh Chandra Ghosh, "Female Occupations in Bengal," Bengal Social Science Association, Calcutta, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1868, in Bela Dutta Gupta, *Sociology in India* (Calcutta: Centre for Sociological Research, 1972), app., pp.60-61. Quoted in Footnote 5 by Sumanta Banerjee in *Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal* in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.) *Recasting Women – Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1989, p.169.

<sup>8</sup> Socio-cultural rituals performed by women linked mainly to birth, marriage and death.

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Due to the nature of their work, the poor and workingwomen had to move in the mainstream peopled by all kinds of men. This world was considered to be a dangerous society that was a threat to the sheltered sisters who lived in the *andarmahals* of upper class Bengali families. For the members of the *andarmahal* or *antahpur*, these women were the only link the world outside. With the decline of the village economy and the beginnings of industry in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, there was a regular exodus of poorer men and women from the countryside to Calcutta.<sup>9</sup>

*Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* offers a microcosm of the different kinds of women described above. The Chowdhury women of the mansion are – (a) the widowed eldest *bahu* (c) *majhli bahu* (c) *chhoti bahu*, (d) an entire retinue of maids including personal attendants who look after the physical details of bathing, plaiting the hair, making them up, draping their *saris* and putting on their jewellery for them. The eldest *bahu* is obsessively ritualistic. She goes to the Ganges for a bath enclosed in a tent like *purdah*.

The script describes it like this :

*Scene 18: Four maidservants in tussar sarees are stretching a mosquito curtain and the whole procession moves towards a waiting carriage closed on all sides. The Badi Bahu is going for a bath in the Ganges.* (Original Screenplay: NFAI).

In another shot, the widow sits frozen with her hands held aloft in the air, having washed them 65 times because they have been ‘polluted’ for some flimsy reason. The fear of pollution of Brahmin widows is pathetically evoked (Chakravarty: 129) through just two scenes. *Majhli Bahu* is shown only once. She lives by the rules of the *zamindari* code for women, indulging herself with jewellery and rich clothes and chiding *chhoti bahu* for not accepting what is considered the privilege of the husband – to spend his nights in the company of a singing girl, a whore, and thus trying to defy the norms of marriage within the *zamindari* home. *Chhoti Bahu* is different because she is simultaneously inside and outside, belonging as she does, to a poor family brought into this aristocratic and wealthy family purely by virtue of her beauty (outside); willing wife and unwilling whore to her husband *Chhote Babu* (inside).

This brings us to a diametrically opposite face of womanhood within *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*. The character of Jaba is a case in point. Jaba, Subinoy Bhattacharya’s daughter, makes her appearance only in Scene 10 of the script. Subinoy has a factory in Bagh Bazar that manufactures *Mohini Sindoor*. The script

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<sup>9</sup> Banerjee Sumanta: *Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal* in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.) *Recasting Women – Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1989, p.129.

describes her as “a very beautiful girl sitting on a corner chair with some embroidery on her lap. She is wearing her sari in the modern drape like the Brahmos and her blouse has long sleeves. She laughs mischievously, is bubbly and talkative (Original Screenplay: NFAI:Pune). The Brahmo Samaj was split twice in the 1870s over questions of marriage laws and the ‘age of consent.’ What has perplexed historians is the rather sudden disappearance of such issues from the agenda of public debate towards the close of the century. From then on, questions about the position of women in society failed to arouse the same degree of passion and acrimony they did just a few decades before.<sup>10</sup> The overwhelming issues of the politics of nationalism seemed to have overshadowed these questions.

Jaba is a blend of the modern and the traditional, open with her jokes made at the expense of Bhootnath, yet reticent about expressing her own feelings when she realizes she has fallen in love with him. She is not confined to the narrow spaces of the inner house (the *antahpur*) like the daughters-in-law (*bahus*) of the Chowdhury family. She plays the piano, signs registers and performs the functions of a liberated and educated woman. Gradually however, she glides into domestic life, as would a woman of the house. When the Brahmin cook is dismissed for stealing rations, Jaba cooks for her father and for Bhootnath. When Bhootnath is accidentally injured in a police firing, it is she who nurses him back to health. As members of the Brahmo Samaj, Subinoy and Jaba represent the progressive element of the upcoming bourgeoisie. Bhootnath provides the link between the two worlds.

The relationship between Jaba and Bhootnath, which begins on an awkward note, Bhootnath resenting Jaba’s teasing and taunting approach towards him, matures into mutual love, culminating in marriage. The marriage, points out Geeti Sen<sup>11</sup> is not merely due to the two’s growing mutual attraction but rather because their marriage had already been solemnized in their childhood, much before Subinoy Babu had converted to the Brahmo Samaj. The last scene shows them leaving the scene of the ruined Chowdhury mansion in a carriage. There is a point of departure here from the original novel. In the novel, Bhootnath does not reveal his identity as Jaba’s husband but encourages her to marry the man her father had chosen for her. (Chakravarty: 177)

The growing relationship between Bhootnath and Jaba cuts out all questions about any possible erotic suggestion of something brewing between *Chhoti Bahu* and Bhootnath. There is no notion of triangular love at work here though most analysts and film scholars who have studied the film in-depth have unfailingly focussed on the detailed, slow and seductive building up of the first encounter

<sup>10</sup> Chatterjee, Partha: *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question* in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.) *Recasting Women – Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1989, p.232.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Geeti Sen, p.114.

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between *Chhoti Bahu* and Bhootnath. The first encounter is almost designed to look both erotic and seductive. But this eroticism is used as a pointer to prove that inspite of the unparalleled beauty and seductive charm *Chhoti Bahu* is naturally endowed with; she has completely failed to seduce her husband to the marital bed. He continues to visit his keep every night and comes home drunk in the wee hours of the morning. The look of surprise on Bhootnath's face when he looks up at her face for the first time, is a visual document of surprise that (a) a woman so ravishingly beautiful should remain confined indoors, (b) she should deck herself so every day to wait for her husband, all in vain, (c) she should be so deliberately seductive in her speech pattern, her body language, her approach, (d) she should have the courage to beckon a young man not related to her in any way, into her private chambers, and (e) his first vision of her having been foreshadowed by his already having witnessed *Chhote Babu's* nocturnal adventures complemented by the latter's complete neglect of his wife, despite her unparalleled beauty and charm. Bhootnath experiences at the same time, roughly jumbled up feelings of shock, fascination, amazement, surprise, fear and a certain degree of cowardice.

Arun Khopkar<sup>12</sup> has written that the representations of the two women, namely *Chhoti Bahu* and Jaba, complement each other and together present a comprehensive picture of Indian womanhood. *Chhoti Bahu* is photographed in dark or somber tones, usually within the closed space of her private chambers or in the half-darkened corridors of the mansion. She always appears wearing a lot of jewellery and in richly brocaded saris that shine and glimmer, as does her hair, mostly loose and flowing. Her whole being is sensuous; her beauty appears to be in full bloom. Jaba, on the other hand, is almost austere in her simplicity; her saris are white, she floats with the lightness of a gazelle in open air, with bright and even lighting, playing with flowers, singing melodious numbers, trotting off gracefully. *Chhoti Bahu* represents the death wish; Jaba stands for the forces of life. While *Chhoti Bahu* signifies the decay of the feudal class, Jaba represents the rise of the enterprising bourgeoisie (Chakravarty: 114-115). The body language of the two heroines is choreographed to suggest their intrinsic difference – Jaba is active and *Chhoti Bahu* is passive – viewed from long range and at close quarters. Jaba is on the threshold of 'stepping out' while *Chhoti Bahu* is sequestered in her chambers, looking within herself.<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, the meetings between Jaba and Bhootnath take place usually in broad daylight, devoid of mystery. But their conversations are constrained and left incomplete. Neither of them are able to express their feelings vocally or through articulate expression. The encounters between *Chhoti Bahu* and Bhootnath on the

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<sup>12</sup> Khopkar, Arun: *Guru Dutt*, pp.102-117.

<sup>13</sup> Sen, Geeti, *Feminine Fables – Imaging the Indian Woman in Painting, Photography and Cinema*, Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2002, p.114-115.

other hand, are clandestine and take place in the darkness of the evening or night, or, within the dim light of *Chhoti Bahu's* quarters. Jaba is a tall, lissome beauty, dressed in white, with luxuriant dark tresses and a defiant pair of mocking eyes. She offers a stunned Bhootnath a ravishing smile the first time he meets her, as if in complete contrast to his first encounter with *Chhoti Bahu* elaborated later in this paper. She shares her father's masculine space and is the centre of the world of *Mohini Sindoor*. She participates in male conversation circulating in the room, suggesting her emancipated position in the Brahmo household. During factory hours, she organizes all the food that is cooked for the workers and reads, writes or plays the piano in her free time. In the words of Darius Cooper, "she is a woman who commands every space she inhabits" (Cooper: 52). *Chhoti Bahu* is also at the centre of her own world. But it is a world she has built for herself because she is forced into it and not of her own volition. Her 'space' is enclosed, confined, narrow, limited and sharply defined by the values of the family she is married into.

### The Antahpur :

The conflict in *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* is centred around *Chhoti Bahu*, her relationship with the environment and her relationship with the two men in the house – *Chhote Babu*, her husband, and Bhootnath who is not related to her either by blood or by marriage but somehow, as witness to her tragedy, as a friend of sorts, finds himself helplessly sucked into the vortex of tragedy her life is defined by. The conflict manifests itself in the lifestyle and tensions arising within the household and also from the rather ordinary background *Chhoti Bahu* originally comes from. *Chhoti Bahu's* entry is only in Scene 8 of the script and that too, through a *keertan* floating out from the *janana mahal* or *antahpur* or 'the inner world.'

*Antahpur* is a Bengali word roughly translated as 'the inner world.' This 'inner world' is the result of the division of the total space of a feudal home broadly into three parts – the *sadar*, the *bahir mahal* and the *antahpur*. While males within the home – masters and servants alike, could move freely among the three spaces, the female members of the direct family – mother, wife, daughter and daughter-in-law had to remain confined within the *antahpur* and could not go out. The *sadar* was a small section of the *bahir mahal* meant for male visitors, guests, salesmen and other male outsiders who were not permitted to step into the *antahpur* unless they had specific permission to do so. It is a larger version of the *purdah* practiced within Islamic society and implies a kind of 'collective' *purdah* for immediate female members of the family. Female servants could move freely everywhere and did not have to remain confined to the inner house. However, it never occurred to the women in such families to either question or defy this practice as one that restricted their mobility, their geographical and social freedom.

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Partha Chatterjee (quoted in Sangari and Vaid: 238-239) records a very different interpretation for the rationale for the two worlds delineated for men and for women. He writes: "Apply the inner/outer distinction to the matter of concrete, day-to-day living and you get a separation of the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representation. And so we get an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*."

Satyajit Ray in his adaptation of the Tagore novel *Ghare Baire* – titled *The Home and the World* in English – depicts how Bimala the feudal wife of a village *zamindar* actually crosses the borders of the two worlds to step out and into the *bahir*. It may be noted however, that it is her husband Nikhilesh who motivates her, despite her initial hesitancy, to take the radical step. It changes her world forever and redefines her life, only to end in tragedy. A definition of *antahpur* as "the center of the female world" opens the first chapter of Meredith Bordwick's *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*. (1984: Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. p.7.) Sociological studies have drawn attention to memoirs by women describing their domestic world within this enclosed space. (Sen: 131)

This division of space within a feudal mansion became a compulsory categorization reinforcing the class divisions that defined womanhood at the time. Women who occupied public space within public view, were considered, even by themselves, as 'public' women, a very derogatory term with respect to moral, ethical and social standards of the time. Autobiographical accounts by women, who performed in public such as Binodini Dasi,<sup>14</sup> clearly reflect the low self-esteem these women accepted as an integral part of their image and personality. The marital and motherhood status of these women is ambiguous and is designedly so. Even where such women have been open about their marital status, men and women have accepted it with different degrees of disbelief.

The women who remained confined to the inner spaces of their homes, mainly their marital homes, are considered to be 'respectable' their identity being the product of the family they are married into, the husband they are married to and their hierarchical positioning within the family. For example, the mother-in-law, if she is the senior most member, enjoys more power than her daughters-in-law or younger sisters-in-law do. The minute they step into these homes after marriage,

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<sup>14</sup> Dasi, Binodini: *Amar Katha* in Bengali was published in Bengali in serial form in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has been translated into English by Rimli Bhattacharya under the title: *Binodini Dasi, My Story and My Life as an Actress*, 1998, Kali for Women, New Delhi.

these women lose their previous identity, including their names. None of the *bahus* in the Choudhury mansion are known by their names, first or second. So, though Bhootnath calls her *Bouthan*, a form of address used by the younger brother-in-law for his older brother's wife, throughout the film, she is known just as *Chhoti Bahu* – by her husband, her sisters-in-law and by the servants and maids. The same applies to *Badi Bahu* and *Majhli Bahu*. Widowhood among the women lower down in the hierarchy somewhat dilutes the power they enjoyed when their husbands were alive. But they still remain confined within the *antahpur*. But the most significant element that characterizes this placement/power/spatial confinement is that no woman within this class questions the system. Despite social reform movements introduced by the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal and the Arya Samaj in the Punjab, and an influential lobby for the education of women, it was understood by one and all that the relationship between the public and private domains was not to be disturbed. (Sen: 104)

### Circumventing and Transgressing the *Antahpur*

Looking back at her evolution through the narrative and cinematographic space of the film, *Chhoti Bahu* offers a classic example of how confinement into the *antahpur*, socially coerced or conditioned by the rules of the *zamindar* home, need not necessarily be followed either in principle or to the letter. The irony of the whole situation is that *Chhoti Bahu*'s circumvention and transgression of the *antahpur* code sanctioned by the filial one and legitimated by the moral one were both achieved with the singular purpose of gaining the love of her husband *Chhote Babu* and through this love, to fulfill her sexual desires. "Circumvention" here is used to mean 'the breaking of a rule in its essence and spirit, while physically appearing to stick to it.' "Transgression" signifies "a conscious breaking of the rule – in essence, in spirit and in physical terms, with or without caring for the consequences that may follow." Circumvention implies a certain degree of secrecy, subtlety and political strategy. Therefore, it is difficult to recognize. Transgression implies secrets that may get revealed in the process of the transgression itself, thereby bringing about the possibility of severe punishment at the hands of those who made the rules and commanded unquestioned compliance to them in the first place.

From the point when we are introduced to *Chhoti Bahu* till the point when her husband rejects her overtures and goes back to his woman, (though he discovers that she has now found herself a new paramour), every single action of *Chhoti Bahu*, sometimes shown directly and sometimes indirectly, is aimed at gaining her husband's affections, company and physical love. Sen writes that simply put, merging a wife's duties with her desires, becomes an act of transgression. (Sen: 117) The dishonour and disrepute such circumvention and transgression supposedly bring about are linked to the honour and reputation of the family and the haveli



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and not to the woman who has actually practiced such circumvention and transgression, willingly or unwillingly. It is as if, the woman as a person simply does not exist. If she does, she does so only as a physical 'body', a piece of decorative furniture that adds to the glamour of the *haveli*, notwithstanding that this 'decorative furniture' unlike its inanimate counterparts like the expensive settee or the marble-topped table with carved legs, remains beyond public view, and is a flesh-and-blood human being with feelings, desires, and a mind for thinking.

Three important sequence of scenes from the script underscore the lengths to which *Chhoti Bahu* goes in order to gain her husband's love and loyalty. The first such instance comes across much before *Chhoti Bahu* is visually introduced into the cinematographic space of the film as a foreshadowing of the events that follow and also as an indicator of *Chhoti Bahu's* adherence to rituals and Hindu beliefs in traditional practices delineated for loyal wives firstly to prevent widowhood and secondly to attract the attention of their perpetually straying husbands towards themselves.

Scene 14: *Bansi informs Bhootnath that Chhote Babu did not come home the previous night.*

*Bhootnath is passing through. He notices Bansi approaching from the opposite direction. Bansi has his right arm raised straight over his head. In this hand, he is holding a small pot. He is dodging passers-by briskly and is walking fast.*

Scene 15: *Bansi enters a room. Bhootnath dallies by the door and peeps inside. Chhote Babu is seen lying on a huge gadda (mattress). Over his head, someone outside is pulling a huge, hanging fan. He is surrounded by scattered soda bottles, glasses, a peekdaan (a cauldron-like vessel into which men and women of aristocratic families spit out the remnants of betel nuts, betel leaves and tobacco) etc. Heavily drunk, he appears to be dizzy.*

*Bansi crouches near his feet. Taking the pot in his hand close to Chhote Babu's toe, Bansi tries to raise Chhote Babu's foot. All this appears very confusing to Bhootnath....Before Bansi can achieve his mission, (dipping the toe into the water in the pot) Chhote Babu jerks his foot away. Bansi barely manages to save the pot from toppling over.*

*When Chhote Babu asks Bansi what brought him here, Bansi says:*

*Bansi: (entreating) Yesterday, Bahurani was on fast for Ashtami my Lordship and you did not come home.*

*He further tells Chhote Babu that Chhoti Bahurani will not be able to break her fast unless she drinks water touched by her husband's*

*feet. He requests Chhote Babu to dip his toes into the pot of water. Bahurani has not drunk a drop from the day before. It takes Bansi some time and a lot of pain before he can accomplish his mission. (Original Screenplay: NFAI).*

The second instance comes across in Scene 18. Soon after the maids in their *tussar* saris have taken *Badi Bahu* to the Ganges for a bath, the camera cuts to Bansi approaching Bhootnath. Bansi informs Bhootnath in a whisper that *Chhoti Bahu* has asked him to come to her room at night. Scenes 22 and 23 are a carefully detailed building up of sound, song and visual as Bhootnath accompanies Bansi to his secret rendezvous with *Chhoti Bahu* at midnight for the first time. Scene 23 repeats the lines and sounds Bhootnath could 'hear' in the opening scenes of the film that show him in the 'present.' (Original Screenplay: NFAI) *Chhoti Bahu's* purpose of calling Bhootnath into her chambers is innocent. In her intense desire to win the attention of her husband (who never visits her), she is willing to risk all and try any remedy. She asks Bhootnath to bring her the magic *sindoor* from the factory where he works, reputed to inspire/revive conjugal passion.

Scene 24 – Chhoti Bahu's room. *When Bhootnath enters the room, he is too nervous to look up to her face. Bansi gently pushes him forward. Bhootnath keeps looking down at the carpet when a lady's velvety voice is heard.*

Voice: (Pleasantly) *Come...come here.*

*Looking down still, Bhootnath moves towards the direction of the voice. Somehow, without looking, he feels he is quite close to the unseen lady.*

Voice: *Bansi, shove off now!*

*With his head still bowed, Bhootnath sits down cross-legged on the floor. He is strongly tempted to look up, but does not have the courage. He only notices a pair of beautiful feet bordered with **alta** in front of him.*

Voice: (Mirthfully) *Looks like you are a shy man.* (Original Screenplay:NFAI).

He looks up to meet her eyes and looks at her face only when she tells him that his pet name, Bhootnath, is a very beautiful name. (*Bada hi sundar naam hai.*) She adds that his name is beautiful because it is the name of Shiva and he explains that he was born on *Shivaratri*.<sup>15</sup> For the first time, he sees a beautiful woman

<sup>15</sup> *Shivaratri* is a night (ratri) of festivities in celebration of Lord Shiva, male consort of Kali/Durga. It is celebrated once a year, some time during spring. Unwed girls fast for 24 hours prior to midnight on the night of *Shivaratri* praying for a husband as good and as tolerant as Shiva. They break their fast only after offering prayers and flowers to the Lord at a temple. It is performed by all Hindu women, married and unwed, right across the country till this day.

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facing him. He cannot take his eyes off her. Then, in the same scene, *Chhoti Bahu* places some money in his palm. He keeps looking at her, utterly confused and worried. *Chhoti Bahu* tells him that it is for *Mohini Sindoor* and asks him whether it will be effective or not.

Chhoti Bahu: (*Reading his confused expression*) *Men cannot be made to understand this. Neither can all women. A woman whose destiny has a hole in it, perhaps alone can understand this. There is no greater insult, no greater shame for a woman. (Shouts) Bansi! I'll look forward to your visit tomorrow.* (Original Screenplay: NFAI).

CUT.

The last sentence in the above dialogue suggests the curt yet indirect dismissal of Bhootnath from her domain. So there is absolutely no sexual innuendo suggested here.

The third time we see her completely surrendering to her blind faith in the magical effects of *Mohini Sindoor*, delivered to her clandestinely courtesy Bhootnath. Geeti Sen calls this the *piece de resistance* of the film. (Sen: 114-115) *Chhoti Bahu* attires herself in all her finery, preparing to meet her *Chhote Babu*. Set to music, she goes through the paces of having her long tresses of hair brushed and bound by her attendants, her forehead annointed with the magic *sindoor*, which she applies herself, her lovely body draped in a black *jamdani* sari and adorned with jewels.

Details of *Chhoti Bahu* are shown in slow-paced and intense close-ups as she is seated before the long mirror, holding up a small hand mirror to view herself. The mirror here, in addition to being symbolic of female vanity, functions as a sign of her transformation, an instrument with which she tries to look *within* herself. With all its multiple associations, the mirror here signifies the means of effecting her transformation from a wife waiting in vain for her wayward husband to come to her, into a woman who is desperate to woo him into her bedchamber, decked in all the finery a concubine might deck herself with for a customer, so that at last, a physical union between *Chhote Babu* and this wife-turned-whore is brought about. She is so sure about the magic qualities of the *sindoor* that her reflection in the mirror shows her smiling with happiness written on her face, perhaps for the first and last time in the film. *Chhoti Bahu* is willing to transform herself: to play the role of a seductress, a wanton and 'intoxicated' woman desperate to 'serve' her lord at any cost. She is as intoxicated with the obsession to 'possess' her husband as much as she later gets intoxicated by liquor. The purpose is the same even if the means to gain such purpose are different.

*Mohini Sindoor* however, hopelessly fails to deliver the magic it is known for. *Chhote Babu* remains completely unimpressed with his wife's behaviour, specially

because he has been summoned to her private chambers on a false pretext. *Chhote Babu* steps in just as her dressing up is complete. As soon as he enters, he sees his wife reflected in the long mirror as much as *Chhoti Bahu* herself smiles at his reflection in the same mirror. The reflected image, through the mirror, signifies the state of their relationship – for they have no physical or emotional contact. Though perhaps for *Chhote Babu*, it marks the first time that he is looking at his wife properly and fully, he reminds her that as the scion of a *zamindar* family, the hot blood that flows through his veins demands a passion no wife can fulfill. He asks her – can she perform the role of the courtesan he visits every night? Can she drink with him and entertain him the way she does? He taunts her and mocks her, thus humiliating and insulting not only the hopes she had built around *Mohini Sindoor* and its elaborated links, but also *Chhoti Bahu* herself. He brushes her aside as he leaves, smudging the ineffectiveness of the magic *sindoor* as a red stain on her forehead.

This is the portrait of *Chhoti Bahu* till the point her husband rudely brushes her aside. With reckless abandon, *Chhoti Bahu* decides to rise to this challenge and to perform the services he demands. She begins to drink, and her dreams are fulfilled for some time. *Chhote Babu* begins to spend his evenings in the company of his wife. They drink together and make love, their relationship being consummated amidst her hysterical laughter. Soon after, *Chhote Babu* begins to resent her behaviour as it reminds him of the seductive manners of the courtesans he frequents. He cannot accept *Chhoti Bahu* wearing the image and manners of a courtesan, never mind the fact that he paid her no attention when she was just a *Bahu*. It is something he cannot take for long and he renews his visits to the courtesan only to find that she has found herself another suitor. His repeated visits result in a brawl. *Chhote Babu* is severely injured and then paralyzed.

But her circumvention of the *antahpur* has already begun. *Sahib, Bibi Aur Ghulam* provides two concrete instances of circumvention and one concrete instance of transgression. But the implications go deeper into the unwritten social history of the time, investing it with newer meanings and giving it a significance that reaches far beyond common knowledge and known history.

The first circumvention occurs when she summons Bhootnath into her private chambers clandestinely at midnight. It is the beginning of a series of such meetings, unknown to the male members of the Choudhury family but with the support of Bansi. Without having to step out of her *antahpur*, *Chhoti Bahu* skirts around the rule by asking Bhootnath to come to her. She knows that this is not done. She is aware of the disastrous consequences that might befall her if the secret is revealed. That is precisely the reason why she keeps the meeting secret. Bhootnath does the same without being expressly told to do so.

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The second circumvention occurs when *Chhoti Bahu* begins to drink in order to seduce her wayward husband. She does not step out of her *antahpur* even once to achieve this. Bhootnath is her conspirator in this action. He is sorry to see her in the state she is in – first when she takes to drinking to bring her husband close to her and secondly when she becomes an incurable alcoholic. During this process, the relationship between *Chhoti Bahu* and Bhootnath grows from strength to strength though the two are unequal in every sense – in terms of their sexual identity, in terms of their social class, in terms of their financial standing, in terms of their hierarchical standing, in terms of their personal freedom or the lack of it, and in terms of their age and relationship. It is a bonding based on a mutual reciprocity of understanding and trust. The relationship is completely devoid of any sexual undertones or overtones. Yet, it is a relationship that is doomed to a tragic denouement by the very reason of its unequal and ambiguous status. Without breaking the physical norm of crossing the borders of the *antahpur*, *Chhoti Bahu* breaks it in essence and in spirit, by making the drinking of liquor into a habit, using the help of a man unrelated by blood or family ties, to fetch it for her.

The only act of transgression happens after *Chhote Babu* is bedridden with an attack of paralysis. In a final act of trying to cure her husband desperately of his paralysis, she plans firstly to give up liquor and secondly, to visit a famous *sadhu* who might help her husband recover. Bhootnath, who has returned to the mansion after having gone away to train as an architect for some time, finds the mansion and the family in decay. It is already partially in ruins. *Chhoti Bahu* asks Bhootnath to accompany her. This results in *Chhoti Bahu* leaving the mansion perhaps for the first time since her entry into it. This too, in the company of a man who is not related to her in any way. They share a mistress-servant relationship where the two are not supposed to even meet each other, leave alone travelling together in the same covered horse-drawn carriage to an undisclosed destination.

This is an act of double dishonour and shame for the Chowdhurys, brought upon by a *bahu* within the family. It is in blatant violation of the unwritten code of the *antahpur* for the Choudhury women, in concrete, physical terms, and also in terms of family and social values. Her noble intentions for the pilgrimage do not enter into this argument at all. Her actions are the only things that are considered. And for this transgression, she is punished with death. *Chhoti Bahu* transgresses the moral and geographical code of the *antahpur* also in essence and in spirit. *Majhle Babu*, the male head of the Chowdhury household, observes her actions. He summons his henchmen and orders them to kill her. She is killed on the way to the *sadhu*, Bhootnath is hit on the head and recovers consciousness only to learn that *Chhoti Bahu* has disappeared and *Chhote Babu* has died.

## Conclusion

*Chhoti Bahu* is Guru Dutt's most supremely tragic heroine. One observes that none of her circumventing and transgressing acts ends on a positive note. Her

conspiratorial assignments with Bhootnath, with the *Mohini Sindoor* as with the liquor he brings for her much against his will, are doomed to failure. Her only act of transgression of the *antahpur* ends in death. Her burial within the precincts of the Choudhury mansion where a shocked Bhootnath finally discovers her last remains goes completely against her last wish to be decked in bridal attire so that people would know that she had been a dutiful wife, remains not only unfulfilled, but also insulted. That does not do away with the fact that the code of the *antahpur*, as seen in and through *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* and other writings of Bimal Mitra, was neatly turned on its head by the a woman whose freedom of movement remained constrained by it. In effect, by getting *Chhoti Bahu* killed, in his last show of power, *Majhle Babu* destroys the one person who brought dignity to their decaying world.<sup>16</sup> *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* will remain one of the most outstanding celluloid testimonies of the feudal class of *zamindars* in Bengal. The film stands out as a savage critique of the arrogance and hegemony of this now-extinct class for the way it victimized those it held within its power – be the starving peasants outside or the repressed wives of the *antahpur*.

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<sup>16</sup> Kabir, Nasreen Munni: *Guru Dutt – A Life in Cinema*, OUP, Delhi, 1997, pp.113.

## The Public Sphere : The British Coffeehouse in the Age of Enlightenment

*Zenith Roy*

“A lot can happen over coffee,” says the tagline of a popular coffee shop brand. “A lot” indeed happened over coffee in the coffeehouses from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain. It is the period when the English coffeehouse which, as the descendant of the barber shop, the university dining and debating halls, and the taverns of the Middle Ages, emerged as the true public sphere, carrying into England the torch of the Enlightenment that had started to kindle other parts of the European continent.

The consumption of coffee in the first half of the seventeenth century was a privilege enjoyed exclusively by a small circle of the English virtuosi. The proliferation of coffeehouses after the Restoration led to the expansion of the clientele of coffee as it became everyman’s staple drink. By 1720 both the coffeehouse and coffee consumption had become firmly entrenched and thoroughly assimilated into the fabric of the British society.

The first coffeehouse in Britain was established in Oxford in 1650 by a Jewish entrepreneur named Jacob who opened a coffeehouse at the Angel.<sup>1</sup> Following this, Oxford became the birthplace of the exclusive phenomenon called coffeehouse culture and played a major role in facilitating the subsequent development of that culture throughout the 1650s. “The Oxford milieu of the 1650s was crucial to shaping English expectations of what sort of place the new institution called a coffeehouse was supposed to be.”<sup>2</sup> And this was made possible chiefly by the coming together of orientalist scholarship at the university and the rise of a bustling young scientific community in the town. The Oxford coffeehouses developed a unique character and identity of their own, which placed them in a league different from and superior to the other public houses. The power of Oxford’s coffeehouses lay in their close contact with the commonality and their intent of providing something beyond the mere rendezvous for social interaction and gossip. The Oxford coffeehouse became the perfect spot for a serious and sober discussion on all matters of common interest. “. . . From the very beginning they were invested with a distinctive brand of learned, but not at all pedantic, sociability that was far from the well-established association of alehouses and taverns with a wide variety of vices, such as drunkenness, criminality, and public disorder. The coffeehouse was a place for “virtuosi” and “wits,” rather than for the plebes or *roues* who were commonly portrayed as typical patrons of the alcoholic drinking houses.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Cowan, *The Social life of Coffee: the Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

"A social stereotype for coffeehouse society was established in its Oxford origins, but it was in metropolitan London where this model was most fully developed,"<sup>4</sup> so much so that it became an indispensable part of London's identity. "Foreigners remarked that the coffee-house was that which especially distinguished London from all other cities; that the coffee-house was the Londoner's home, and that those who wished to find a gentleman commonly asked, not whether he lived in Fleet Street or Chancery Lane, but whether he frequented the Grecian or the Rainbow."<sup>5</sup> A survey made in 1739 found a staggering total of 551 coffee houses in London.<sup>6</sup> "Of course the most famous establishments of eighteenth-century London were the coffee houses . . . By the turn of the century, there were some two thousand of them in the capital."<sup>7</sup> The prime reasons for the growing popularity of the coffeehouse, according to Macaulay, were "the convenience of being able to make appointments in any part of the town" and the more alluring convenience "of being able to pass evenings socially at a very small charge."<sup>8</sup>

"The crucial social legitimacy for both the coffee commodity and the coffeehouse was provided by the unique combination of a genteel virtuoso 'culture of curiosity' and a rapidly growing commercial world centred in London . . . The virtuosi provided the catalyst that spurred the initial commercial interest in coffee and the development of the coffeehouse as a significant social institution."<sup>9</sup> The virtuoso travellers and particularly the virtuoso readers of travel literature were the first Englishmen to know of and drink coffee and to convey that delightful experience to their countrymen through their writings. Thus the Anglicization of the oriental coffee was made possible by the virtuosi whose initiative led to the development of the coffeehouse as a significant social institution. The virtuosi initiative, combined with the ability of coffee to adapt itself to the changing demands of the consumer, enabled coffee to survive all competitions and attain iconic popularity. The natural extension of the virtuosi fondness for coffee was their patronization of the earliest English coffeehouses. This facilitated the proliferation of coffeehouses in urban England, particularly in and around London. "Their interests and social codes and conventions set the template upon which the coffeehouse milieu developed. The virtuoso fascination with novelty and the penchant of the virtuosi for wide-ranging discourse on the multifarious topics set the tone for later expectations for what a coffeehouse would be."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London: Vintage, 2001) p. 320.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Ackroyd, pp. 319-320.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Ackroyd, p. 320.

<sup>9</sup> Cowan, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



## The Public Shpere : The British Coffeehouse in the Age of Enlightenment

“...A space where men could escape from their roles as subjects, and gain autonomy in the exercise and exchange of their opinions and ideas,”<sup>11</sup> is how Jürgen Habermas, the propounder of the ‘public sphere’ theory, defines the “public sphere”. Habermas has always regarded the coffeehouse of the Enlightenment as the prime example of the “public sphere”:

It was open to all comers (except women); it was an urban and a commercial venue (hence it was “bourgeois”); and most important, it was a place in which rational debates on diverse matters, ranging from literary worth to high politics, could be carried out in a sober and rational way among equals. It was a place where right reason, and not social rank, was supposed to determine who won and who lost in debate.<sup>12</sup>

Habermas defines the coffeehouse as “a novel and unique social space in which distinctions of rank were temporarily ignored and uninhibited debate on matters of political and philosophical interest flourished.”<sup>13</sup> The growing popularity of the coffeehouse in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century was a pointer to the fact that the hub of cultural life was shifting from the Court to the public sphere of the metropolis. This shift from Court to town majorly contributed to London becoming the all-important nucleus of England’s cultural existence and simultaneously led to the flourishing of coffeehouses across the city.

Following Habermas’ instance, scholars and historians have reckoned the British coffeehouse as the epitome of the public sphere. Dorinda Outram holds that the English coffeehouses belonged to the intellectual public sphere with their active transfusion of enlightened ideas. They were “commercial operations, open to all who could pay and thus provided ways in which many different social strata could be exposed to the same ideas.”<sup>14</sup>

Enlightened ideas transfused through print culture, a culture that became open to larger number of individuals after the “reading revolution” at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, turned the coffeehouses into intellectual public spheres. They were undoubtedly a part of the public sphere of the Enlightenment as they offered various forms of print items, including newspapers, journals and some of the latest books. The English coffeehouses are also considered a part of a more political public sphere of the Enlightenment as they were “born in an age of revolution, restoration, and bitter party rivalries. (They) provided public space at a time when political action and debate had begun to spill beyond the institutions that had traditionally contained them.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Cowan, p. 149.

<sup>13</sup> Cowan, Introduction. *The Social life of Coffee: the Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Outram, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> James Van Horne Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 241.

One of the prime factors working in favour of the rise of the coffeehouse was commercial. "The coffee-houses acted as counting-houses and auction rooms, offices and shops, in which merchants and agents, clerks and brokers, could engage in business. Agents who sold estate and property would meet their clients in such places, while the sale of other goods was also encouraged."<sup>16</sup> The social place occupied till now by the club was taken by the coffeehouse, but the factors that differentiated the later from the former were its more informal approach and accessibility. The coffeehouses of the day epitomized the ideals of liberty and equality through the eclectic mix of their clientele. Whether a royalty or the man in the street, the doors of the coffeehouse were open for all. "In days when men stood much on their rank, it had a levelling influence; at the coffee-house 'you will see blue ribbons and stars sitting familiarly with private gentlemen, as if they had left their quality and degrees of distance at home.'<sup>17</sup> "Like Noah's Ark, every kind of creature in every walk of life (frequented coffeehouses). They included a town wit, a grave citizen, a worthy lawyer, a worship justice, a reverend nonconformist, and a voluble sailor."<sup>18</sup> Protocols of rank and hierarchy were abandoned within the coffeehouse. According to a contemporary broadside proudly proclaiming the *Rules and Orders of the Coffee-House*: "First Gentry, tradesmen, all are welcome hither, / And may without affront sit down together: / Preeminence of place, none here should mind, / But take the next fit seat that he can find: / Nor need any, if finer persons come, rise up to assigne to them his room."<sup>19</sup> "[W]hat a lesson to see a lord, or two, a baronet, a shoemaker, a tailor, a wine-merchant, and a few others pouring over the same newspapers. Truly the coffee houses . . . are the seats of English liberty."<sup>20</sup>

The coffeehouse played a major part in spreading the thoughts and ideals of the Enlightenment prevalent in other parts of Europe, primarily as alternative venues of knowledge and intellectual exchange. Since their inception, the coffeehouses, particularly those in and around Oxford, turned out to be virtual universities, often called "penny universities" as the common visitor could gain entry into them at the meagre payment of a penny and entitle himself not only to a steaming cup of coffee but also thoughts and ideas articulated by learned minds. Thus an individual entering a coffeehouse could acquire priceless education for the price of an expendable penny. The coffeehouses thus formed an alternative location of learning free from the formality of institutional education :

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<sup>16</sup> Ackroyd, p. 321.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries: Chaucer to Queen Victoria* (U.K.: Penguin Books, 1944, 1982 rep.) p. 340.

<sup>18</sup> Aytoun Ellis, *Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-Houses* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956) p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> Cowan, p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Porter, p. 19.

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The coffeehouse was a place for like-minded scholars to congregate, to read, as well as to learn from and to debate with each other, but it was emphatically *not* a university institution, and the discourse there was of a far different order than any university tutorial. The coffeehouse thus occupied a social space distinct from those older centres of learning which were constrained by their dependence on church or state patronage as well as their stubborn 'scholastic' refusal to accept the methods and supplements offered by Bacon's 'new learning,' which were so dear to the virtuosi.<sup>21</sup>

All in all, coffeehouse learning proved itself to be an able supplement to the traditional university curriculum. The informal air of the coffeehouse patronized the spread of knowledge and learning. A person entering a coffeehouse was guaranteed to come out wiser and more enriched in knowledge. John Houghton's writings, both in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* as well as in his own financial weekly, *A Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade*, affirm this immensely important contribution of the coffeehouses to the advancement of learning since their introduction:

Coffee-houses make all sorts of people sociable, the rich and the poor meet together, as also do the learned and unlearned. It improves arts, merchandize, and all other knowledge; for here an inquisitive man, that aims at good learning, may get more in an evening than he shall by books in a month: he may find out such coffee-houses, where men frequent, who are studious in such matters as his enquiry tends to, and he may in short space gain the pith and marrow of the others reading and studies. I have heard a worthy friend of mine .. who was of good learning . . . say, that he did think, that coffeehouses had improved useful knowledge, as much as [the universities] have, .and spake in no way of slight to them neither.<sup>22</sup>

The coffeehouses were the joint for enlightened minds to unite and spread their thoughts and ideas into the society:

Dryden held court at Will's in Covent Garden, where Pope was later a habitué, Addison patronized nearby Button's, and the Tory wits went to Pall Mall. The Bedford was popular with thespians; Old Slaughter's in St. Martin's Lane became the artist's haunt; and, when in London, Edinburgh cronies gathered at the British coffee house, by Charing Cross . . . It was at a coffee-house that Pope found Dryden; and here it was that Addison discoursed to a select circle; and Johnson delivered his sententious periods.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cowan, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 99.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Compton-Rickett, *A History of English Literature: from Earliest Times to 1916*. (New Delhi: Universal Book Stall, 1990) p. 194-195.

"I am quite familiar at the Chapter Coffee-house, and know all the geniuses there," wrote Thomas Chatterton to his mother in May 1770.<sup>24</sup> "To this coffee-house of hacks or 'pen-drivers', seventy years after Chatterton, came Charlotte and Emily Bronte."<sup>25</sup>

The coffeehouses . . . were centres around which radiated the thoughtful and intelligent . . . Politicians, lawyers, clergymen, literary men met at these places and discussed the problems of the hour. Thus the author and his public were forced into intimate proximity. If you admired a man's writings, you hastened to his coffeehouse, where you might hear him holding forth to his own special friends.<sup>26</sup>

It was well after the Restoration that the coffeehouse continued its role as a centre for informal learning and debate among the virtuosi. As Randal Caudill says, "The coffee houses catered for the entire range of 'gentlemanly arts' prescribed by contemporary courtesy literature and projected in the curricula of the gentlemen's training academies."<sup>27</sup> One could take lessons in the French, Italian, or Latin languages; it was possible to sign up for instruction in dancing, fencing, or equestrian skills, or take in lectures in poetry, mathematics, or astronomy — all in the coffeehouses of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century London. The coffeehouses virtually became the schools of wit and dialectic. "Here had been the home of the idea; the 'baiting place of wit,' the forge where the rough thought was welded into policy."<sup>28</sup>

The coffeehouses were also places where one would get the latest news on every aspect of contemporary life. "The coffeehouses bundled news and coffee together as a means of attracting their customers. News could be consumed in various forms: in print, both licensed and unlicensed; in manuscript; and aloud, as gossip, hearsay, and word of mouth."<sup>29</sup> The coffeehouse became the favourite haunt for all concerned to gain and share news. Every man of the upper or middle class went daily to his coffee-house to learn the news and to discuss it. Every coffee-house had one or more orators to whose eloquence the crowd listened with admiration, and who soon became what the journalists of our time have been called, a Fourth Estate of the realm. Macaulay describes the coffeehouses of Restoration England as "the chief organs through which the public opinion of the metropolis vented itself," and soon became a veritable 'fourth Estate of the realm.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ackroyd, p. 322.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 323.

<sup>26</sup> Compton-Rickett, p. 194.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Cowan, p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> Compton-Rickett, p. 194.

<sup>29</sup> Cowan, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Cowan, p. 148.

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For Samuel Pepys, the aspiring young virtuoso, “the coffeehouse was less a venue to display his own virtuosity . . . than it was a place where he might learn from others.”<sup>31</sup> At the Rota, one of the most popular but short-lived coffeehouses of then London, Pepys met William Petty, the politician, economist and one of the founder members of the Royal Society. The topics on which Petty and Pepys chatted at various times ranged from contemporary literature and music to an attempt to produce a universally accepted system of characters or symbols which could represent the words from any language, and from the Cartesian dream argument to biology and natural history, new mechanical inventions, and strange natural phenomena, as well as medicine and chemistry. Pepys’ subsequent decision to become a fellow of the Royal Society was probably influenced by the accounts of the experiments being performed by the virtuosi of the Royal Society at Gresham College which he avidly listened to at the coffeehouse. But his interest in virtuoso culture went beyond scientific matters, and he used his coffeehouse socializing to acquaint himself with painters or composers, or to discuss theories of political economy or the history of the Roman Empire.

The role of the coffeehouse as a public sphere also included that of the scientific laboratory where experimental facts were discussed and debated. Scientists of the post-Restoration England fervently courted public understanding and approval and the London coffeehouses proved to be a highly effective means to communicate with the public. “Initially in London’s coffeehouses, lecturers began to offer demonstrations with globes, orreries, and other instruments displaying the marvels of the clockwork universe, while performing chemical, magnetic, electrical and airpump experiments besides. In the spring of 1713, for instance, Newton’s protégé William Whiston was holding forth on mathematics and science at both Douglas ‘coffee house in St. Martin’s Lane and at the marine coffee house near the Royal Exchange...”<sup>32</sup> Newton himself repaired of an evening to the Grecian, one of London’s premiere coffeehouses.<sup>33</sup>

The British coffeehouse of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century thus proved to be the true specimen of the “public sphere”. This public role of the coffeehouse continued until its popularity started waning from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and by the end of the century the coffeehouse had become extinct. According to Aytoun Ellis, the flawed business policy of the coffeehouse patrons, the evolution of the club, and the colonial policy of the government were the prime reasons for the decline of the coffeehouse. To this was added the snobbery of the upper-class clients who considered the common man too inferior a species to be mingled with. The doors were shut for strangers. The coffeehouses went out of bounds for the

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<sup>31</sup> Cowan, p. 148.

<sup>32</sup> Porter, p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> Compton-Rickett, p. 194.

commoner and thus gradually lost their popularity. They were reduced to joints exclusively for the elite. They were “no longer needed as meeting-places for political or literary criticism and debate.”<sup>34</sup>

The English coffeehouse of the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century thus deserves its rightful place in the history of the period, particularly for its contribution to the Enlightenment in England as the quintessential public sphere. Macaulay’s words aptly underline this significance:

The coffee-house must not be dismissed with a cursory mention. It might indeed at that time have been not improperly called a most important political institution. No Parliament had sat for years. The municipal council of the City had ceased to speak the sense of the citizens. Public meetings, harangues, resolutions, and the rest of the modern machinery of agitation had not yet come into fashion. Nothing resembling the modern newspaper existed. In such circumstances the coffeehouses were the chief organs through which the public opinion of the metropolis vented itself.<sup>35</sup>

The coffeehouse had witnessed and influenced the ebb and tide of the time in its own unassuming way :

They had seen the nation pass through one of its greatest periods of trial and tribulation; had fought and won the battle age of profligacy; and had given us a standard of prose-writing and literary criticism unequalled before or since.”<sup>36</sup>

With the waning of the popularity of the coffeehouses and their gradual relegation to insignificance, it was the passing of an era.

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<sup>34</sup> Ellis, p. 239.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, “The Coffee Houses of London” from *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, 1848, 12 December 2011 <<http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/a/coffeehousesessay.htm>>

<sup>36</sup> Ellis, p. 239.

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## **H.G.Wells' *Ann Veronica* and Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and The World*: Contrasting Studies of the New Woman**

***Dr. Shymasree Basu***

H.G.Wells' *Ann Veronica* (1909) and Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1919) were written within a decade of each other. Both the novels chronicle coming-of-age of their respective protagonists foregrounding the themes of sexual morality, marriage and women's involvement in the political movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in their respective countries. Thus *Ann Veronica* and *The Home and the World*, in spite of their representations of two different cultures, try to explore the problematic aspects of a woman trying to construct her identity in a society that has a strict code governing the relations between men and women (within and outside marriage) and expects the woman to conform to it.

*Ann Veronica* in Wells' eponymously named novel tries to break away from these restrictions that according to her are designed to make her withdraw from living life itself. At the outset the narrator has this to say about her:

She wanted to live. She was vehemently impatient-she did not clearly know for what-to do, to be, to experience. And experience was slow in coming. All the world about her seemed to be –how can one put it?-in wrappers, like a house when people leave it in the summer. The blinds were all drawn, the sunlight kept out, one could not tell what colours these grey swathing hid...Presently she woke up to the fact that there was a considerable group of interests called being in love and getting married, with certain attractive and amusing subsidiary developments, such as flirtation and “being interested” in the people of the opposite sex. (*Ann Veronica* 6-7)

Wells describes *Ann Veronica*'s initial confusion regarding her purpose in life in a somewhat comic manner but her severely limited existence is made evident in the simile where her life is compared to a house with Holland covers on the furnishings. *Ann Veronica* experiments with flirtations but is soon curbed by her mistresses at school. However she shows definite tendencies in her behaviour that make her seem like a rebel. Although her father restricts any forays into higher education believing that this would “unsex” her in some unaccountable way, *Veronica* continues her campaign for her rights, undaunted. At the beginning of the novel she clamours for her own latch-key, a chance to study biology at a premiere college and also to socialize with her circle of friends such as the Widgetts, who frequented art gatherings, socialist meetings as well as student dances. Her first confrontation with her father occurs when he forbids her to go to a dance with



them. Thus it is quite evident that Ann Veronica refuses to conform to the prescribed code of Victorian femininity and is set upon a course that would necessarily make her defy her father's wishes. Tagore's Bimala on the other hand, at the beginning of the novel describes herself as a happily married woman, and finds consummate bliss in performing the duties of a wife. She feels that a woman's devotion to her husband is the most appealing aspect of her personality. She recalls an incident from her own childhood when her mother served fruits to her father, carefully peeled and set out on a white stone plate. Bimala remarks in retrospect about this rather quotidian ritual:

I know, from my childhood's experience, how devotion is beauty itself, in its inner aspect...her service would lose itself in a beauty which passed beyond outward forms. (*The Home and the World* 12)

Tagore alternates the narration of the novel between Bimala and her husband Nikhil and his friend Sandip thus giving the narrative a layered perspective. It is at her husband's insistence that Bimala is given a western education and brought out of her conservative household where women had to observe *purdah*. It is evident that the educated Nikhil wanted Bimala to be his equal in every respect. Perhaps like the Western world, Nikhil wanted Bimala to be a new woman of the twentieth century. It is ironical that Bimala while narrating her story in retrospect, appreciates Nikhil's magnanimity but still endorses her earlier view that devotion was love in its purest form. She remarks:

My beloved it was worthy of you that you never expected worship from me. But if you had accepted it, you would have done me a real service...But vanity such as this only checks the flow of free surrender in a woman's love. Can there be any real happiness for a woman in merely feeling that she has power over a man? To surrender one's pride in devotion is woman's only salvation. (*The Home and the World* 15-16)

At this juncture, I would like to observe the concept of "New Woman" as it emerged during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. According to Sally Ledger in *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the fin de siècle*:

The New Woman of the fin de siècle had a multiple identity. She was variously, a feminist activist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was also often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth century women's movement. (Ledger 1)

Wells and Tagore are both responding to the phenomenon of the "New Woman" while creating their protagonists. Wells' Ann Veronica becomes involved with

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the suffragists and believes passionately in the equality of the sexes .She does not want to get married having seen her sister's sorry state of life after marriage. The narrator remarks :

As a net result she had come to think of all married people much as one thinks of insects that have lost their wings, and of her sisters as new hatched creatures who had scarcely for a moment had wings.  
(*Ann Veronica* 72)

Miss. Miniver also passionately talks to her about the ills of maternity. She tells Veronica:

In all the species of animals the females are more important than the males. Only in man is the male made most important. And that happens through our maternity; it's our very importance that degrades us. While we were minding the children they stole our rights and liberties...There is no remedy...except the vote. (*Ann Veronica* 38-40)

Miss Miniver's diatribe is permeated with references to men in such a manner that Veronica finds it hard to interpret her hostility towards men or her bitter vindictiveness .For good measure she throws in such epithets as "toys", "delicate trifles" and "a sex of invalids" to project the extreme oppression of woman .Veronica herself fully supports only one conclusion of Miss Miniver and that is her view that men were at a loss to know what to do with the women now that they could not be married off at an early age. It is evident that her father's unreasonable opposition to her demands makes her endorse this absurd statement.

Wells has constructed Veronica as a "New Woman" and has allied her development with her gradually dawning perception about the truth of a woman's position in society, especially in a politically turbulent time. At the beginning Veronica wants a vote and feels strongly about marriage but her arrival in London inaugurates a new period in her life and she reviews her ideology and ironically enough by the end of the novel she believes strongly about love and has quite forgotten her earlier passion for equal rights and the need to have a vote. Wells prepares the reader for Veronica's later change of heart when the narrator gives an insight into her heart while she is contemplating rejecting the proposal of Mr. Manning:

That Mr Manning loved her presented itself to her bloodlessly, stilled from any imaginative quiver or thrill of passion or disgust. It was another world from that in which men will die for a kiss, and touching hands lights fires that burn up lives-the world of romance, the world of passionately beautiful things...

But that other world, in spite of her resolute exclusion of it...invaded her dreams, it wrote upon the passage walls of her mind. Its shouting

now did in some occult manner convey a protest that Mr Manning would on no account do, though he was tall and dark and handsome and kind, and thirty-five and adequately prosperous, and all that a husband should be. (*Ann Veronica* 61-62)

Veronica moves to London, takes up private lodgings and enrolls in a college to study biology, all the while wondering what she was meant to do. In the meanwhile she strikes up a friendship with Mr. Ramage who gives her financial assistance to cover her expenses in London. Veronica does not realise until later that Mr. Ramage was in love with her. Thus for the better part of the novel Wells' characterisation of Ann Veronica as a "New Woman" is done in a faithful manner. She believes in the equality of the sexes, is a suffragist but her feminist bias is undermined by her attraction to what she defines as the other world. It is her faith in this other world that prevents her from being a convert to the suffragist cause. Wells is quite deliberately interrogating the feminist credentials of the so-called "New Woman" through Ann Veronica. Therefore in her refusal to Mr. Manning she speaks affirmatively about marriage and motherhood, departing drastically from her earlier stance:

"I have been thinking things over lately, and it seems to me marriage for a girl is just the supremest thing in life. It isn't just one among a number of important things; for her it is the important thing, and until she knows far more than I know of the facts of life, how is she to undertake it?" (*Ann Veronica* 106)

Veronica's comments sound a lot like Bimala's faith in wifely devotion within a marriage, which she thinks is the most sublime joy that the conjugal state can bestow upon a woman. Tagore and Wells both take their protagonists through a difficult path to bring them to self-realisation. It must be remembered that Bimala endorses wifely devotion in retrospect of the upheaval that has occurred in her own marriage after her husband liberated her from the cloistered hearth that was a woman's lot in the early twentieth century. Bimala's husband Nikhil justifies his decision to take her outside her home in the following manner:

Up until now Bimala was my home-made Bimala, the product of the confined space and the daily routine of small duties. Did the love I received from her, I asked myself, come from the deep spring of her heart, or was it merely like the daily provision of pipe water pumped up by the municipal steam-engine of society?

I longed to find Bimala blossoming fully in all her truth and power...

I had hoped that when Bimala found herself free in the outer world she would be rescued from her infatuation for tyranny. But

now I feel this infatuation is deep down in her nature. Her love is for the boisterous. From the tip of her tongue to the Tip of her stomach she must tingle with red pepper in order to enjoy the simple fare of life. (*The Home and the World* 51-52)

It is evident that Nikhil feels Bimala's impetuosity to be a mark of her immaturity and is disappointed with her fervent support of the *swadeshi* movement and her instinctive response to Sandip's aggressive brand of nationalism. In this case Nikhil is acting as the spokesperson for Tagore and critiquing patriotism that did not care for moderation. Bimala's willing conversion to the *swadeshi* cult is also Tagore's ironical comment on the new woman in the Indian context. Nikhil brings Bimala out of the home to make her realise the liberal/modern dimension of love only to see her swayed away by the fiery rhetoric of Sandip. Nikhil wants to create a new woman in Bimala only to realise that his ideal Bimala would remain a figment of his imagination. Bimala's attraction towards Sandip complements her political outlook. She is unwilling to analyse her emotions and is impatient when Nikhil tries to use reason to justify his apparently neutral stance. Bimala justifies her own passionate response towards Sandip and the *swadeshi* movement in the following manner:

When in Sandip's appeals, his worship of the country gets to be subtly interwoven with his worship of me, then does my blood dance, indeed, and the barriers of my hesitation totter... I felt that my resplendent womanhood made me indeed a goddess. (*The Home and the World* 109)

Bimala uses images of fire and heat to express her heightened physical response to Sandip. There is a marked similarity between her words and Ann Veronica's statement: 'Hot blooded marriage or none!' (*Ann Veronica* 62) that she utters, when she takes the decision of rejecting Mr. Manning. Wells depicts Veronica's dawning sexual awareness in great detail after she confesses to herself that she is in love with Capes, an instructor at college. While engaged in some biological dissection she falls to admiring the exquisite physical contours of the specimen and as if on cue her mind starts dwelling on him:

She became aware of his presence as she never had been aware of any human being in her life before. She became aware of the modelling of his ear, of the muscles of his neck and the textures of the hair that came off his brow... They were, she realized, acutely beautiful things... She felt him as something solid and strong and trustworthy beyond measure. The perception of him flooded her. (*Ann Veronica* 180-181)

Bimala and Ann's sexual awakening is described rather explicitly and there is a suggestion that this sexual attraction for a man is something integral to their

sense of existence and not a transgression. Thus it is clear that when Tagore and Wells are constructing their new woman they are deliberately creating them as individuals who place the highest value on love and passion. Thus Veronica does not seem to be overly concerned about suffragists when Capes comes into her life.

It is to Tagore's credit that he characterised Bimala as a woman who has the capacity to make a free choice although she errs in the process compromising her own character and her marriage. She finds freedom intoxicating and revels in it but finally comes back home repentant of her transgressions. Although the conservative ending of the novel invites the reader to respond to issues such as *swadeshi* and women's engagement in the political sphere with caution and discretion Bimala is a new woman in her own right. According to Quayum Bimala is Tagore's attempt to create a new role model by dismantling the old one of the suffering Sita. He writes :

Discarding the ideal of complete submission ,Tagore instead presents an alternative model for Indian women,the empowering ideal of Durga ,the warrior goddess and embodiment of Shakti (the primal feminine power indispensable to Creation)...By allowing Bimala freedom of choice, Tagore has highlighted the potential of Indian women and their right to emancipation.(*Muktomona* 1)

Tagore certainly projects Bimala as a woman who has the power of choice and in her narration she comes across as an honest woman. However she is also aware that her passionate nature does not have the necessary restraint that is required to lend it maturity. While writing in a confessional strain she admits :

One night I left my bed and slipped out of my room on to the open terrace. Beyond our garden wall are fields of ripening rice...The whole scene slept in the darkness like the vague embryo of some future creation.

In that future I saw my country, a woman like myself ,standing expectant. She has been drawn forth from her home corner by the sudden call of some Unknown. She has had no time to pause or ponder, or to light herself a torch, as she rushes forward into the darkness ahead...She is no mother .There is no call to her of children in their hunger, no home to be lighted of a evening, no household work to be done. She has left home, forgotten domestic duties; she has nothing but an unfathomable yearning which hurries her on,— by what road, to what goal, she recks not...

I, also, am possessed of just such a yearning. I likewise have lost my home and also lost my way. Both the ends and the means have

become equally shadowy to me. There remain only the yearning and the hurrying on. (*The Home and the World* 142-143)

It is evident that Bimala herself feels "possessed" when she compares herself to the present state of turmoil in the country. She compares her yearning to the religious ecstasy of the Vaishnavites but she is also subliminally aware that it feels as if she has lost her way. Tagore portrays Bimala as someone who has the power to render disinterested service to the country and definitely has the element of feminine Shakti but they are not enough to make her succeed at home as well as in the world. Her attraction towards the unknown makes her lose her perspective. Although she realises that such an attitude will only confuse her ordered existence she does not have the power to resist this seduction of the unknown. Tagore sees this as Bimala's tragic flaw and it this shortcoming that prevents her from being a self-assured new woman. Her final retreat back to her home is a sure indication that Tagore wants Bimala to construct her identity in the domestic sphere before she can attain the maturity to render service to the world. The final image that we have of Bimala is that of a repentant woman who feels that she has wilfully destroyed her own good fortune. Nikhil and Amulya (the young swadeshi whom Bimala loved as her own son) are also taken away from her making her desolation complete. Bimala's fate, as Tagore projects it, sounds a note of caution to the young women of the country who were swayed by the extremist politics of the time. On another level it represents Tagore's qualified response to the feasibility of the image of the new woman in the Indian context at that point in history.

Wells' response to the phenomenon of the new woman, as evident in his characterisation of the protagonist parodies the idea of women participating in politics. Ann Veronica makes an emotional outburst in the presence of Capes and her classmates trying to state the position of women who were restricted to a life of domesticity. Wells makes it obvious that Veronica is speaking in this manner after she has been propositioned by the elderly Mr. Ramage, a person whom she had thought of as her friend. This is the last time we see the rebellious Veronica and Wells further undermines the suffragist movement when Veronica goes to jail after picketing with them. She replies to Capes' remark that a woman ideally belongs to her home as it is "a little recess" out of "the world of business and competition", by contradicting his idyllic definition and adding that the home was a "pit" and a "prison". She further adds :

No man can realize ...what that pit can be. The way-the way we are led on! We are taught to believe we are free in the world, to think we are queens...Then we find out. We find out that no man will treat a woman fairly as man to man-no man...Woman are mocked ...

Think of the mockery !I know we seem to have a sort of freedom...Have you ever tried to run and jump in petticoats, Mr

Capes? Well, think what it must be to live in them-soul and mind and body! It's fun for a man to jest at our position. (*Ann Veronica* 217-218)

After this diatribe Veronica gets involved with suffragists and it is as if the narrator is mocking her political pretensions. Very soon she repents her folly and writes to her father cured of her youthful, headstrong ways. She even admits the virtues of her earlier existence that she had dismissed as the 'wrapped' life. After coming out of jail she confesses her love for Capes and they decide to live in sin as Capes is not divorced from his ex-wife. After their tour of the Alps they return to London. The conclusion of the novel is a further proof of Wells' response to the new woman as a fictional construct as an utopian concept that cannot be realized as women were ill-suited to it. In one stroke Wells demolishes the nascent women's movements of the time as Veronica willingly succumbs to marriage and matrimony. Veronica quite forgets her quest to be her own person and conforms to marriage and motherhood-things which she had greatly underestimated. Veronica's retreat into domesticity and sentimentality shows that Wells does not believe in the idea of the new woman and is content to make his heroine an epitome of Victorian womanhood.

Tagore's handling of the protagonist as a new woman is done realistically and Tagore sees Bimala's lack of restraint as a quality that is afflicting a large section of the population in the throes of the nationalist movement of the early years of the twentieth century. Bimala introspection gives her some semblance of maturity and her retrospective narration is done with depth and understanding. Wells however creates Veronica with a lot of promise only to deliberately deflate her pretensions. Her defection to conservative womanhood is actually Wells' implicit criticism of the ineffectiveness of the women's movements. Wells is clearly advocating a return to femininity and a total segregation of women from politics and Ann Veronica becomes the vehicle of his regressive ideology.

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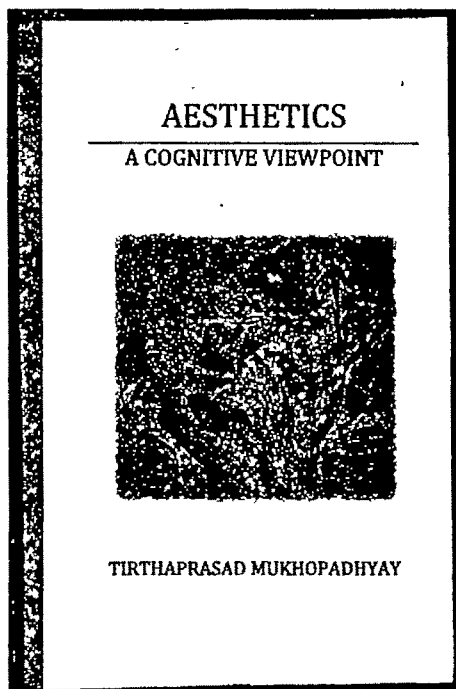
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## SOME PUBLICATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

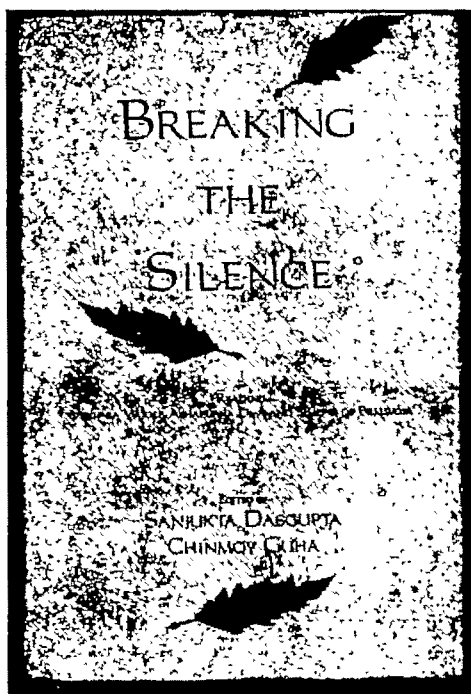


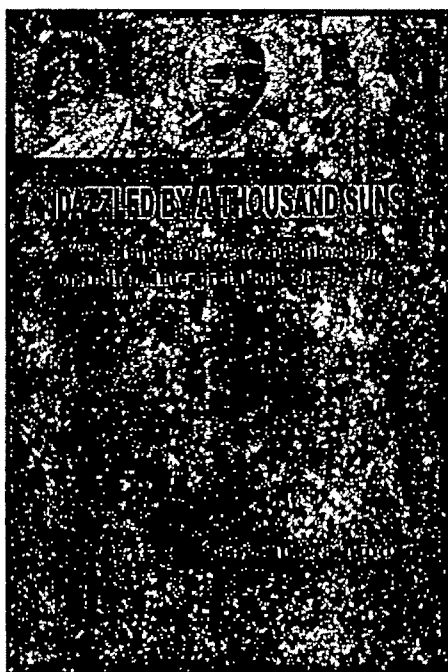
### TIRTHA PRASAD MUKHOPADHYAY

This book reveals tremendous research and audacious theorizing on the nature and origin of artistic impulses. Patanjali's dictum that we deploy the same signaling systems as those shared by birds and animals or Darwin's thesis that music had its origin in anti-phonal mating-calls provides the investigative rationale for the essays in this book. The author argues further in favor of certain blue-prints within our neurological system that give rise to aesthetic practices in social life.

### EDITED BY : SANJUKTA DASGUPTA AND CHINMOY GUHA

This path-breaking volume brings together three iconic representatives of twentieth century feminism from both local and global cultures, spanning Britain, France and India. The well-researched and insightful essays critique the voices of Virginia Woolf, Simone De Beauvoir and their Bengali sister Ashapurna Devi by identifying the sameness and differences in women's writing, thereby heralding global sisterhood and feminist internationalism.





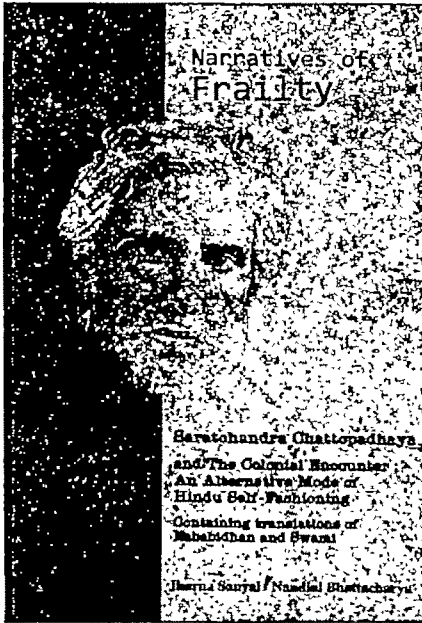
**BY : SANTANU MAJUMDAR**

In this monograph Dr. Majumdar examines Indian responses to The Bhagavad Gita. In interpreting The Gita the thinkers treated of in this monograph – Bankimchandra, Aurobindo, Gandhi, Tagore, Tilak, Vivekananda and Dr. Radhakrishnan – also forge and construct, in significant ways, the Indian nation, whether incidentally or deliberately.



**EDITOR: TAPATI GUPTA**

Professor Tapati Gupta's selection from the issues of *Bangadarshan* represents the diversity of issues that this periodical addressed and the amazing erudition of the writers. The annotated English translations are meant to acquaint the non-Bengali reader with the rich area of nineteenth century Bengal. It will also prove to be an invaluable sourcebook for scholars who cannot read Bengali.



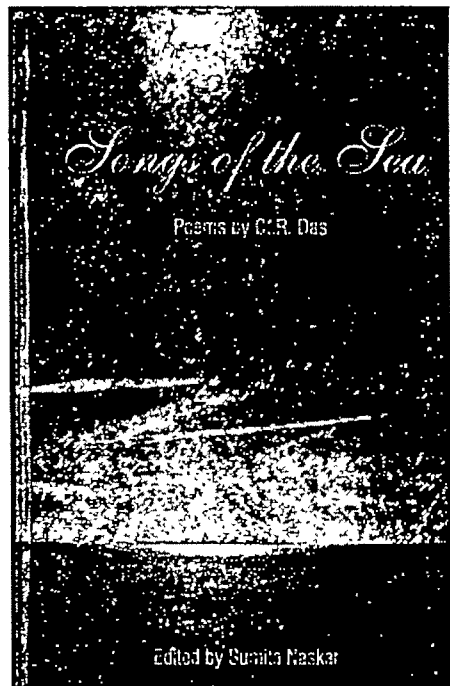
## CONTAINING TRANSLATIONS OF NABABIDHAN AND SWAMI

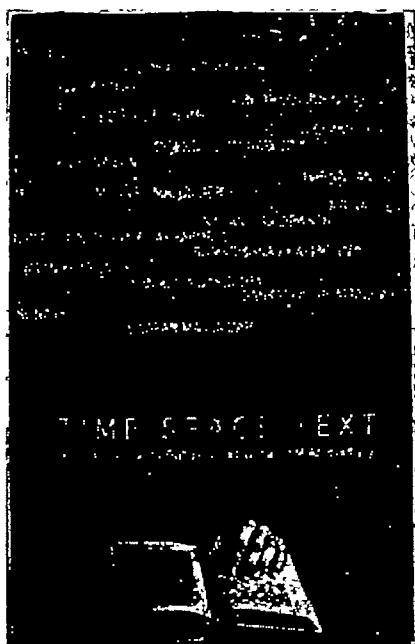
JHARNA SANYAL & NANDINI BHATTACHARYA

This book examines the responses of Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya to the discourses of colonial modernity. In the process it foregrounds the 'alternative', 'indigenous' voices which displace, critique and dialogically agitate not only the civilizing discourses issuing from Europe but also the high-caste, high-class Hindu responses to these discourses. He redefines and resituates 'frailty' as a contestative notion of 'masculinity'. Translations of two of Saratchandra's works *Nababidhan* and *Swami* have been appended to the book as "Narratives" which would elicit a re-reading of these texts in the light of the issues discussed.

## POEMS BY C.R.DAS EDITED BY: SUMITA NASKAR

This present collection includes Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das's lesser known English and Bengali poems entitled *SONGS BY THE SEA* first published in book-form in 1923. On Das's request these poems were also translated into English by Aurobindo Ghosh in the same year. This volume attempts to apprise the reader about the background and the nature of these poetical compositions by both the stalwarts, Das and Ghose. This endeavour is the outcome of the University Grants Commission (UGC) assisted DRS (SAP III) programme.





**EDITED BY: CHINMOY  
GUHA AND TIRTHA PRASAD  
MUKHOPADHYAY**

This volume collects some of the papers on Time, Space, Text presented at the 13<sup>th</sup> Refresher Course organized by the Department of English and the UGC Academic Staff College, University of Calcutta.

In the context of the erosion of boundaries across genres, and a new site of multi-disciplinary, articles by some of our finest film makers, artists, authors and critics will refocus on the spaces within the discourses without sealing them off from other kinds of cultural practice.

**EDITORS: SUDESHNA  
CHAKRAVARTI**

Jean-Paul-Sartre (1905-1980) was not only a major novelist, playwright and philosopher, he was arguably one of the most influential authors of the last century.

The present volume is a collection of some of the papers presented at the Sartre Birth Centenary Seminar organised by the Department of English, University of Calcutta in December 2005. It contains articles by some of the best-known Sartre scholars in the world like Shibnarayan Ray, A. Van Den Hoven, Ronald Aronson, Christina Howells, Constance Mui, and Livio Doberez, as well as reflections by two important post-Sartre French novelists J M G Le Clezio and Marie Darrieussecq.

